



Wharton

Collected Stories 1891-1910

EDITH WHARTON

COLLECTED STORIES
1891–1910



THE LIBRARY OF AMERICA E-BOOK CLASSICS

Volume compilation, notes, and chronology copyright © 2001 by
Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., New York, N.Y.

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any manner whatsoever
without the permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief
quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

THE LIBRARY OF AMERICA, a nonprofit publisher, is dedicated to
publishing, and keeping in print, authoritative editions of America's
best and most significant writing. Each year the Library adds new
volumes to its collection of essential works by America's foremost
novelists, poets, essayists, journalists, and statesmen.

Visit our website at www.loa.org to find out more about The Library
of America, and to sign up to receive our occasional newsletter with
exclusive interviews with Library of America authors and editors,
and our popular [Story of the Week](#) e-mails.

eISBN 978-1-59853-483-2

Print ISBN 978-1-883011-93-2

MAUREEN HOWARD

SELECTED THE CONTENTS AND WROTE THE NOTES FOR THIS VOLUME

Edith Wharton: Collected Stories 1891–1910
is kept in print in loving memory of

MARY McKEEN PATTON
(1917–2004)

by a gift from her daughter

Mary Carr Patton

to the Guardians of American Letters Fund,
established by The Library of America
to ensure that every volume in the series
will be permanently available.

Contents

Mrs. Manstey's View
The Fulness of Life
The Lamp of Psyche
The Valley of Childish Things, and Other Emblems
The Muse's Tragedy
A Journey
The Pelican
Souls Belated
The Twilight of the God
A Cup of Cold Water
The Touchstone
The Duchess at Prayer
The Angel at the Grave
The Recovery
The Rembrandt
The Moving Finger
Sanctuary
The Descent of Man
The Mission of Jane
The Other Two
The Reckoning
Expiation
The Lady's Maid's Bell
The House of the Dead Hand
The Introducers
The Hermit and the Wild Woman
The Last Asset

The Pretext
The Pot-Boiler
The Best Man
His Father's Son
The Daunt Diana
TheDebt
Full Circle
The Legend
TheEyes
Afterward
The Letters

Chronology

Note on the Texts

Notes

COLLECTED STORIES 1891–1910

Mrs. Manstey's View

THE VIEW from Mrs. Manstey's window was not a striking one, but to her at least it was full of interest and beauty. Mrs. Manstey occupied the back room on the third floor of a New York boarding-house, in a street where the ash-barrels lingered late on the sidewalk and the gaps in the pavement would have staggered a Quintus Curtius. She was the widow of a clerk in a large wholesale house, and his death had left her alone, for her only daughter had married in California, and could not afford the long journey to New York to see her mother. Mrs. Manstey, perhaps, might have joined her daughter in the West, but they had now been so many years apart that they had ceased to feel any need of each other's society, and their intercourse had long been limited to the exchange of a few perfunctory letters, written with indifference by the daughter, and with difficulty by Mrs. Manstey, whose right hand was growing stiff with gout. Even had she felt a stronger desire for her daughter's companionship, Mrs. Manstey's increasing infirmity, which caused her to dread the three flights of stairs between her room and the street, would have given her pause on the eve of undertaking so long a journey; and without perhaps formulating these reasons she had long since accepted as a matter of course her solitary life in New York.

She was, indeed, not quite lonely, for a few friends still toiled up now and then to her room; but their visits grew rare as the years went by. Mrs. Manstey had never been a sociable woman, and during her husband's lifetime his companionship had been all-sufficient to

her. For many years she had cherished a desire to live in the country, to have a hen-house and a garden; but this longing had faded with age, leaving only in the breast of the uncommunicative old woman a vague tenderness for plants and animals. It was, perhaps, this tenderness which made her cling so fervently to her view from her window, a view in which the most optimistic eye would at first have failed to discover anything admirable.

Mrs. Manstey, from her coign of vantage (a slightly projecting bow-window where she nursed an ivy and a succession of unwholesome-looking bulbs), looked out first upon the yard of her own dwelling, of which, however, she could get but a restricted glimpse. Still, her gaze took in the topmost boughs of the ailanthus below her window, and she knew how early each year the clump of dicentra strung its bending stalk with hearts of pink.

But of greater interest were the yards beyond. Being for the most part attached to boarding-houses they were in a state of chronic untidiness and fluttering, on certain days of the week, with miscellaneous garments and frayed table-cloths. In spite of this Mrs. Manstey found much to admire in the long vista which she commanded. Some of the yards were, indeed, but stony wastes, with grass in the cracks of the pavement and no shade in spring save that afforded by the intermittent leafage of the clothes-lines. These yards Mrs. Manstey disapproved of, but the others, the green ones, she loved. She had grown used to their disorder; the broken barrels, the empty bottles and paths unswept no longer annoyed her; hers was the happy faculty of dwelling on the pleasanter side of the prospect before her.

In the very next enclosure did not a magnolia open its hard white flowers against the watery blue of April? And was there not, a little way down the line, a fence foamed over every May by lilac waves of wistaria? Farther still, a horse-chestnut lifted its candelabra of buff and pink blossoms above broad fans of foliage; while in the opposite yard June was sweet with the breath of a neglected syringa, which

persisted in growing in spite of the countless obstacles opposed to its welfare.

But if nature occupied the front rank in Mrs. Manstey's view, there was much of a more personal character to interest her in the aspect of the houses and their inmates. She deeply disapproved of the mustard-colored curtains which had lately been hung in the doctor's window opposite; but she glowed with pleasure when the house farther down had its old bricks washed with a coat of paint. The occupants of the houses did not often show themselves at the back windows, but the servants were always in sight. Noisy slatterns, Mrs. Manstey pronounced the greater number; she knew their ways and hated them. But to the quiet cook in the newly painted house, whose mistress bullied her, and who secretly fed the stray cats at nightfall, Mrs. Manstey's warmest sympathies were given. On one occasion her feelings were racked by the neglect of a house-maid, who for two days forgot to feed the parrot committed to her care. On the third day, Mrs. Manstey, in spite of her gouty hand, had just penned a letter, beginning: "Madam, it is now three days since your parrot has been fed," when the forgetful maid appeared at the window with a cup of seed in her hand.

But in Mrs. Manstey's more meditative moods it was the narrowing perspective of far-off yards which pleased her best. She loved, at twilight, when the distant brown-stone spire seemed melting in the fluid yellow of the west, to lose herself in vague memories of a trip to Europe, made years ago, and now reduced in her mind's eye to a pale phantasmagoria of indistinct steeples and dreamy skies. Perhaps at heart Mrs. Manstey was an artist; at all events she was sensible of many changes of color unnoticed by the average eye, and dear to her as the green of early spring was the black lattice of branches against a cold sulphur sky at the close of a snowy day. She enjoyed, also, the sunny thaws of March, when patches of earth showed through the snow, like ink-spots spreading on a sheet of white blotting-paper; and, better still, the haze of boughs, leafless but swollen, which

replaced the clear-cut tracery of winter. She even watched with a certain interest the trail of smoke from a far-off factory chimney, and missed a detail in the landscape when the factory was closed and the smoke disappeared.

Mrs. Manstey, in the long hours which she spent at her window, was not idle. She read a little, and knitted numberless stockings; but the view surrounded and shaped her life as the sea does a lonely island. When her rare callers came it was difficult for her to detach herself from the contemplation of the opposite window-washing, or the scrutiny of certain green points in a neighboring flower-bed which might, or might not, turn into hyacinths, while she feigned an interest in her visitor's anecdotes about some unknown grandchild. Mrs. Manstey's real friends were the denizens of the yards, the hyacinths, the magnolia, the green parrot, the maid who fed the cats, the doctor who studied late behind his mustard-colored curtains; and the confidant of her tenderer musings was the church-spire floating in the sunset.

One April day, as she sat in her usual place, with knitting cast aside and eyes fixed on the blue sky mottled with round clouds, a knock at the door announced the entrance of her landlady. Mrs. Manstey did not care for her landlady, but she submitted to her visits with ladylike resignation. To-day, however, it seemed harder than usual to turn from the blue sky and the blossoming magnolia to Mrs. Sampson's unsuggestive face, and Mrs. Manstey was conscious of a distinct effort as she did so.

"The magnolia is out earlier than usual this year, Mrs. Sampson," she remarked, yielding to a rare impulse, for she seldom alluded to the absorbing interest of her life. In the first place it was a topic not likely to appeal to her visitors and, besides, she lacked the power of expression and could not have given utterance to her feelings had she wished to.

"The what, Mrs. Manstey?" inquired the landlady, glancing about the room as if to find there the explanation of Mrs. Manstey's

statement.

“The magnolia in the next yard—in Mrs. Black’s yard,” Mrs. Manstey repeated.

“Is it, indeed? I didn’t know there was a magnolia there,” said Mrs. Sampson, carelessly. Mrs. Manstey looked at her; she did not know that there was a magnolia in the next yard!

“By the way,” Mrs. Sampson continued, “speaking of Mrs. Black reminds me that the work on the extension is to begin next week.”

“The what?” it was Mrs. Manstey’s turn to ask.

“The extension,” said Mrs. Sampson, nodding her head in the direction of the ignored magnolia. “You knew, of course, that Mrs. Black was going to build an extension to her house? Yes, ma’am. I hear it is to run right back to the end of the yard. How she can afford to build an extension in these hard times I don’t see; but she always was crazy about building. She used to keep a boarding-house in Seventeenth Street, and she nearly ruined herself then by sticking out bow-windows and what not; I should have thought that would have cured her of building, but I guess it’s a disease, like drink. Anyhow, the work is to begin on Monday.”

Mrs. Manstey had grown pale. She always spoke slowly, so the landlady did not heed the long pause which followed. At last Mrs. Manstey said: “Do you know how high the extension will be?”

“That’s the most absurd part of it. The extension is to be built right up to the roof of the main building; now, did you ever?”

Mrs. Manstey paused again. “Won’t it be a great annoyance to you, Mrs. Sampson?” she asked.

“I should say it would. But there’s no help for it; if people have got a mind to build extensions there’s no law to prevent ’em, that I’m aware of.” Mrs. Manstey, knowing this, was silent. “There is no help for it,” Mrs. Sampson repeated, “but if I *am* a church member, I wouldn’t be so sorry if it ruined Eliza Black. Well, good-day, Mrs. Manstey; I’m glad to find you so comfortable.”

So comfortable—so comfortable! Left to herself the old woman

turned once more to the window. How lovely the view was that day! The blue sky with its round clouds shed a brightness over everything; the ailanthus had put on a tinge of yellow-green, the hyacinths were budding, the magnolia flowers looked more than ever like rosettes carved in alabaster. Soon the wistaria would bloom, then the horse-chestnut; but not for her. Between her eyes and them a barrier of brick and mortar would swiftly rise; presently even the spire would disappear, and all her radiant world be blotted out. Mrs. Manstey sent away untouched the dinner-tray brought to her that evening. She lingered in the window until the windy sunset died in bat-colored dusk; then, going to bed, she lay sleepless all night.

Early the next day she was up and at the window. It was raining, but even through the slanting gray gauze the scene had its charm—and then the rain was so good for the trees. She had noticed the day before that the ailanthus was growing dusty.

“Of course I might move,” said Mrs. Manstey aloud, and turning from the window she looked about her room. She might move, of course; so might she be flayed alive; but she was not likely to survive either operation. The room, though far less important to her happiness than the view, was as much a part of her existence. She had lived in it seventeen years. She knew every stain on the wall-paper, every rent in the carpet; the light fell in a certain way on her engravings, her books had grown shabby on their shelves, her bulbs and ivy were used to their window and knew which way to lean to the sun. “We are all too old to move,” she said.

That afternoon it cleared. Wet and radiant the blue reappeared through torn rags of cloud; the ailanthus sparkled; the earth in the flower-borders looked rich and warm. It was Thursday, and on Monday the building of the extension was to begin.

On Sunday afternoon a card was brought to Mrs. Black, as she was engaged in gathering up the fragments of the boarders’ dinner in the basement. The card, black-edged, bore Mrs. Manstey’s name.

“One of Mrs. Sampson’s boarders; wants to move, I suppose. Well,

I can give her a room next year in the extension. Dinah," said Mrs. Black, "tell the lady I'll be upstairs in a minute."

Mrs. Black found Mrs. Manstey standing in the long parlor garnished with statuettes and antimacassars; in that house she could not sit down.

Stooping hurriedly to open the register, which let out a cloud of dust, Mrs. Black advanced to her visitor.

"I'm happy to meet you, Mrs. Manstey; take a seat, please," the landlady remarked in her prosperous voice, the voice of a woman who can afford to build extensions. There was no help for it; Mrs. Manstey sat down.

"Is there anything I can do for you, ma'am?" Mrs. Black continued. "My house is full at present, but I am going to build an extension, and——"

"It is about the extension that I wish to speak," said Mrs. Manstey, suddenly. "I am a poor woman, Mrs. Black, and I have never been a happy one. I shall have to talk about myself first to—to make you understand."

Mrs. Black, astonished but imperturbable, bowed at this parenthesis.

"I never had what I wanted," Mrs. Manstey continued. "It was always one disappointment after another. For years I wanted to live in the country. I dreamed and dreamed about it; but we never could manage it. There was no sunny window in our house, and so all my plants died. My daughter married years ago and went away—besides, she never cared for the same things. Then my husband died and I was left alone. That was seventeen years ago. I went to live at Mrs. Sampson's, and I have been there ever since. I have grown a little infirm, as you see, and I don't get out often; only on fine days, if I am feeling very well. So you can understand my sitting a great deal in my window—the back window on the third floor——"

"Well, Mrs. Manstey," said Mrs. Black, liberally, "I could give you a back room, I dare say; one of the new rooms in the ex——"

"But I don't want to move; I can't move," said Mrs. Manstey, almost with a scream. "And I came to tell you that if you build that extension I shall have no view from my window—no view! Do you understand?"

Mrs. Black thought herself face to face with a lunatic, and she had always heard that lunatics must be humored.

"Dear me, dear me," she remarked, pushing her chair back a little way, "that is too bad, isn't it? Why, I never thought of that. To be sure, the extension *will* interfere with your view, Mrs. Manstey."

"You do understand?" Mrs. Manstey gasped.

"Of course I do. And I'm real sorry about it, too. But there, don't you worry, Mrs. Manstey. I guess we can fix that all right."

Mrs. Manstey rose from her seat, and Mrs. Black slipped toward the door.

"What do you mean by fixing it? Do you mean that I can induce you to change your mind about the extension? Oh, Mrs. Black, listen to me. I have two thousand dollars in the bank and I could manage, I know I could manage, to give you a thousand if——" Mrs. Manstey paused; the tears were rolling down her cheeks.

"There, there, Mrs. Manstey, don't you worry," repeated Mrs. Black, soothingly. "I am sure we can settle it. I am sorry that I can't stay and talk about it any longer, but this is such a busy time of day, with supper to get——"

Her hand was on the door-knob, but with sudden vigor Mrs. Manstey seized her wrist.

"You are not giving me a definite answer. Do you mean to say that you accept my proposition?"

"Why, I'll think it over, Mrs. Manstey, certainly I will. I wouldn't annoy you for the world——"

"But the work is to begin to-morrow, I am told," Mrs. Manstey persisted.

Mrs. Black hesitated. "It shan't begin, I promise you that; I'll send word to the builder this very night." Mrs. Manstey tightened her

hold.

“You are not deceiving me, are you?” she said.

“No—no,” stammered Mrs. Black. “How can you think such a thing of me, Mrs. Manstey?”

Slowly Mrs. Manstey’s clutch relaxed, and she passed through the open door. “One thousand dollars,” she repeated, pausing in the hall; then she let herself out of the house and hobbled down the steps, supporting herself on the cast-iron railing.

“My goodness,” exclaimed Mrs. Black, shutting and bolting the hall-door, “I never knew the old woman was crazy! And she looks so quiet and ladylike, too.”

Mrs. Manstey slept well that night, but early the next morning she was awakened by a sound of hammering. She got to her window with what haste she might and, looking out, saw that Mrs. Black’s yard was full of workmen. Some were carrying loads of brick from the kitchen to the yard, others beginning to demolish the old-fashioned wooden balcony which adorned each story of Mrs. Black’s house. Mrs. Manstey saw that she had been deceived. At first she thought of confiding her trouble to Mrs. Sampson, but a settled discouragement soon took possession of her and she went back to bed, not caring to see what was going on.

Toward afternoon, however, feeling that she must know the worst, she rose and dressed herself. It was a laborious task, for her hands were stiffer than usual, and the hooks and buttons seemed to evade her.

When she seated herself in the window, she saw that the workmen had removed the upper part of the balcony, and that the bricks had multiplied since morning. One of the men, a coarse fellow with a bloated face, picked a magnolia blossom and, after smelling it, threw it to the ground; the next man, carrying a load of bricks, trod on the flower in passing.

“Look out, Jim,” called one of the men to another who was smoking a pipe, “if you throw matches around near those barrels of

paper you'll have the old tinder-box burning down before you know it." And Mrs. Manstey, leaning forward, perceived that there were several barrels of paper and rubbish under the wooden balcony.

At length the work ceased and twilight fell. The sunset was perfect and a roseate light, transfiguring the distant spire, lingered late in the west. When it grew dark Mrs. Manstey drew down the shades and proceeded, in her usual methodical manner, to light her lamp. She always filled and lit it with her own hands, keeping a kettle of kerosene on a zinc-covered shelf in a closet. As the lamp-light filled the room it assumed its usual peaceful aspect. The books and pictures and plants seemed, like their mistress, to settle themselves down for another quiet evening, and Mrs. Manstey, as was her wont, drew up her armchair to the table and began to knit.

That night she could not sleep. The weather had changed and a wild wind was abroad, blotting the stars with close-driven clouds. Mrs. Manstey rose once or twice and looked out of the window; but of the view nothing was discernible save a tardy light or two in the opposite windows. These lights at last went out, and Mrs. Manstey, who had watched for their extinction, began to dress herself. She was in evident haste, for she merely flung a thin dressing-gown over her night-dress and wrapped her head in a scarf; then she opened her closet and cautiously took out the kettle of kerosene. Having slipped a bundle of wooden matches into her pocket she proceeded, with increasing precautions, to unlock her door, and a few moments later she was feeling her way down the dark staircase, led by a glimmer of gas from the lower hall. At length she reached the bottom of the stairs and began the more difficult descent into the utter darkness of the basement. Here, however, she could move more freely, as there was less danger of being overheard; and without much delay she contrived to unlock the iron door leading into the yard. A gust of cold wind smote her as she stepped out and groped shiveringly under the clothes-lines.

That morning at three o'clock an alarm of fire brought the engines

to Mrs. Black's door, and also brought Mrs. Sampson's startled boarders to their windows. The wooden balcony at the back of Mrs. Black's house was ablaze, and among those who watched the progress of the flames was Mrs. Manstey, leaning in her thin dressing-gown from the open window.

The fire, however, was soon put out, and the frightened occupants of the house, who had fled in scant attire, reassembled at dawn to find that little mischief had been done beyond the cracking of window panes and smoking of ceilings. In fact, the chief sufferer by the fire was Mrs. Manstey, who was found in the morning gasping with pneumonia, a not unnatural result, as everyone remarked, of her having hung out of an open window at her age in a dressing-gown. It was easy to see that she was very ill, but no one had guessed how grave the doctor's verdict would be, and the faces gathered that evening about Mrs. Sampson's table were awe-struck and disturbed. Not that any of the boarders knew Mrs. Manstey well; she "kept to herself," as they said, and seemed to fancy herself too good for them; but then it is always disagreeable to have anyone dying in the house and, as one lady observed to another: "It might just as well have been you or me, my dear."

But it was only Mrs. Manstey; and she was dying, as she had lived, lonely if not alone. The doctor had sent a trained nurse, and Mrs. Sampson, with muffled step, came in from time to time; but both, to Mrs. Manstey, seemed remote and unsubstantial as the figures in a dream. All day she said nothing; but when she was asked for her daughter's address she shook her head. At times the nurse noticed that she seemed to be listening attentively for some sound which did not come; then again she dozed.

The next morning at daylight she was very low. The nurse called Mrs. Sampson and as the two bent over the old woman they saw her lips move.

"Lift me up—out of bed," she whispered.

They raised her in their arms, and with her stiff hand she pointed

to the window.

“Oh, the window—she wants to sit in the window. She used to sit there all day,” Mrs. Sampson explained. “It can do her no harm, I suppose?”

“Nothing matters now,” said the nurse.

They carried Mrs. Manstey to the window and placed her in her chair. The dawn was abroad, a jubilant spring dawn; the spire had already caught a golden ray, though the magnolia and horse-chestnut still slumbered in shadow. In Mrs. Black’s yard all was quiet. The charred timbers of the balcony lay where they had fallen. It was evident that since the fire the builders had not returned to their work. The magnolia had unfolded a few more sculptural flowers; the view was undisturbed.

It was hard for Mrs. Manstey to breathe; each moment it grew more difficult. She tried to make them open the window, but they would not understand. If she could have tasted the air, sweet with the penetrating ailanthus savor, it would have eased her; but the view at least was there—the spire was golden now, the heavens had warmed from pearl to blue, day was alight from east to west, even the magnolia had caught the sun.

Mrs. Manstey’s head fell back and smiling she died.

That day the building of the extension was resumed.

The Fulness of Life

FOR HOURS she had lain in a kind of gentle torpor, not unlike that sweet lassitude which masters one in the hush of a midsummer noon, when the heat seems to have silenced the very birds and insects, and, lying sunk in the tasselled meadow-grasses, one looks up through a level roofing of maple-leaves at the vast, shadowless, and unsuggestive blue. Now and then, at ever-lengthening intervals, a flash of pain darted through her, like the ripple of sheet-lightning across such a midsummer sky; but it was too transitory to shake her stupor, that calm, delicious, bottomless stupor into which she felt herself sinking more and more deeply, without a disturbing impulse of resistance, an effort of reattachment to the vanishing edges of consciousness.

The resistance, the effort, had known their hour of violence; but now they were at an end. Through her mind, long harried by grotesque visions, fragmentary images of the life that she was leaving, tormenting lines of verse, obstinate presentments of pictures once beheld, indistinct impressions of rivers, towers, and cupolas, gathered in the length of journeys half forgotten—through her mind there now only moved a few primal sensations of colorless well-being; a vague satisfaction in the thought that she had swallowed her noxious last draught of medicine . . . and that she should never again hear the creaking of her husband's boots—those horrible boots—and that no one would come to bother her about the next day's dinner . . . or the butcher's book. . . .

At last even these dim sensations spent themselves in the

thickening obscurity which enveloped her; a dusk now filled with pale geometric roses, circling softly, interminably before her, now darkened to a uniform blue-blackness, the hue of a summer night without stars. And into this darkness she felt herself sinking, sinking, with the gentle sense of security of one upheld from beneath. Like a tepid tide it rose around her, gliding ever higher and higher, folding in its velvety embrace her relaxed and tired body, now submerging her breast and shoulders, now creeping gradually, with soft inexorableness, over her throat to her chin, to her ears, to her mouth. . . . Ah, now it was rising too high; the impulse to struggle was renewed; . . . her mouth was full; . . . she was choking. . . . Help!

“It is all over,” said the nurse, drawing down the eyelids with official composure.

The clock struck three. They remembered it afterward. Someone opened the window and let in a blast of that strange, neutral air which walks the earth between darkness and dawn; someone else led the husband into another room. He walked vaguely, like a blind man, on his creaking boots.

II

She stood, as it seemed, on a threshold, yet no tangible gateway was in front of her. Only a wide vista of light, mild yet penetrating as the gathered glimmer of innumerable stars, expanded gradually before her eyes, in blissful contrast to the cavernous darkness from which she had of late emerged.

She stepped forward, not frightened, but hesitating, and as her eyes began to grow more familiar with the melting depths of light about her, she distinguished the outlines of a landscape, at first swimming in the opaline uncertainty of Shelley’s vaporous creations, then gradually resolved into distincter shape—the vast unrolling of a sunlit plain, aerial forms of mountains, and presently the silver crescent of a river in the valley, and a blue stencilling of trees along its curve—something suggestive in its ineffable hue of an azure

background of Leonardo's, strange, enchanting, mysterious, leading on the eye and the imagination into regions of fabulous delight. As she gazed, her heart beat with a soft and rapturous surprise; so exquisite a promise she read in the summons of that hyaline distance.

"And so death is not the end after all," in sheer gladness she heard herself exclaiming aloud. "I always knew that it couldn't be. I believed in Darwin, of course. I do still; but then Darwin himself said that he wasn't sure about the soul—at least, I think he did—and Wallace was a spiritualist; and then there was St. George Mivart——"

Her gaze lost itself in the ethereal remoteness of the mountains.

"How beautiful! How satisfying!" she murmured. "Perhaps now I shall really know what it is to live."

As she spoke she felt a sudden thickening of her heartbeats, and looking up she was aware that before her stood the Spirit of Life.

"Have you never really known what it is to live?" the Spirit of Life asked her.

"I have never known," she replied, "that fulness of life which we all feel ourselves capable of knowing; though my life has not been without scattered hints of it, like the scent of earth which comes to one sometimes far out at sea."

"And what do you call the fulness of life?" the Spirit asked again.

"Oh, I can't tell you, if you don't know," she said, almost reproachfully. "Many words are supposed to define it—love and sympathy are those in commonest use, but I am not even sure that they are the right ones, and so few people really know what they mean."

"You were married," said the Spirit, "yet you did not find the fulness of life in your marriage?"

"Oh, dear, no," she replied, with an indulgent scorn, "my marriage was a very incomplete affair."

"And yet you were fond of your husband?"

"You have hit upon the exact word; I was fond of him, yes, just as I was fond of my grandmother, and the house that I was born in, and

my old nurse. Oh, I was fond of him, and we were counted a very happy couple. But I have sometimes thought that a woman's nature is like a great house full of rooms: there is the hall, through which everyone passes in going in and out; the drawing-room, where one receives formal visits; the sitting-room, where the members of the family come and go as they list; but beyond that, far beyond, are other rooms, the handles of whose doors perhaps are never turned; no one knows the way to them, no one knows whither they lead; and in the innermost room, the holy of holies, the soul sits alone and waits for a footstep that never comes."

"And your husband," asked the Spirit, after a pause, "never got beyond the family sitting-room?"

"Never," she returned, impatiently; "and the worst of it was that he was quite content to remain there. He thought it perfectly beautiful, and sometimes, when he was admiring its commonplace furniture, insignificant as the chairs and tables of a hotel parlor, I felt like crying out to him: 'Fool, will you never guess that close at hand are rooms full of treasures and wonders, such as the eye of man hath not seen, rooms that no step has crossed, but that might be yours to live in, could you but find the handle of the door?' "

"Then," the Spirit continued, "those moments of which you lately spoke, which seemed to come to you like scattered hints of the fulness of life, were not shared with your husband?"

"Oh, no—never. He was different. His boots creaked, and he always slammed the door when he went out, and he never read anything but railway novels and the sporting advertisements in the papers—and—and, in short, we never understood each other in the least."

"To what influence, then, did you owe those exquisite sensations?"

"I can hardly tell. Sometimes to the perfume of a flower; sometimes to a verse of Dante or of Shakespeare; sometimes to a picture or a sunset, or to one of those calm days at sea, when one seems to be lying in the hollow of a blue pearl; sometimes, but

rarely, to a word spoken by someone who chanced to give utterance, at the right moment, to what I felt but could not express."

"Someone whom you loved?" asked the Spirit.

"I never loved anyone, in that way," she said, rather sadly, "nor was I thinking of any one person when I spoke, but of two or three who, by touching for an instant upon a certain chord of my being, had called forth a single note of that strange melody which seemed sleeping in my soul. It has seldom happened, however, that I have owed such feelings to people; and no one ever gave me a moment of such happiness as it was my lot to feel one evening in the Church of Or San Michele, in Florence."

"Tell me about it," said the Spirit.

"It was near sunset on a rainy spring afternoon in Easter week. The clouds had vanished, dispersed by a sudden wind, and as we entered the church the fiery panes of the high windows shone out like lamps through the dusk. A priest was at the high altar, his white cope a livid spot in the incense-laden obscurity, the light of the candles flickering up and down like fireflies about his head; a few people knelt near by. We stole behind them and sat down on a bench close to the tabernacle of Orcagna.

"Strange to say, though Florence was not new to me, I had never been in the church before; and in that magical light I saw for the first time the inlaid steps, the fluted columns, the sculptured bas-reliefs and canopy of the marvellous shrine. The marble, worn and mellowed by the subtle hand of time, took on an unspeakable rosy hue, suggestive in some remote way of the honey-colored columns of the Parthenon, but more mystic, more complex, a color not born of the sun's inveterate kiss, but made up of cryptal twilight, and the flame of candles upon martyrs' tombs, and gleams of sunset through symbolic panes of chrysoprase and ruby; such a light as illumines the missals in the library of Siena, or burns like a hidden fire through the Madonna of Gian Bellini in the Church of the Redeemer, at Venice; the light of the Middle Ages, richer, more solemn, more significant

than the limpid sunshine of Greece.

“The church was silent, but for the wail of the priest and the occasional scraping of a chair against the floor, and as I sat there, bathed in that light, absorbed in rapt contemplation of the marble miracle which rose before me, cunningly wrought as a casket of ivory and enriched with jewel-like incrustations and tarnished gleams of gold, I felt myself borne onward along a mighty current, whose source seemed to be in the very beginning of things, and whose tremendous waters gathered as they went all the mingled streams of human passion and endeavor. Life in all its varied manifestations of beauty and strangeness seemed weaving a rhythmical dance around me as I moved, and wherever the spirit of man had passed I knew that my foot had once been familiar.

“As I gazed, the mediæval bosses of the tabernacle of Orcagna seemed to melt and flow into their primal forms, so that the folded lotus of the Nile and the Greek acanthus were braided with the runic knots and fish-tailed monsters of the North, and all the plastic terror and beauty born of man’s hand from the Ganges to the Baltic quivered and mingled in Orcagna’s apotheosis of Mary. And so the river bore me on, past the alien face of antique civilizations and the familiar wonders of Greece, till I swam upon the fiercely rushing tide of the Middle Ages, with its swirling eddies of passion, its heaven-reflecting pools of poetry and art; I heard the rhythmic blow of the craftsmen’s hammers in the goldsmiths’ workshops and on the walls of churches, the party-cries of armed factions in the narrow streets, the organ-roll of Dante’s verse, the crackle of the fagots around Arnold of Brescia, the twitter of the swallows to which St. Francis preached, the laughter of the ladies listening on the hillside to the quips of the Decameron, while plague-struck Florence howled beneath them—all this and much more I heard, joined in strange unison with voices earlier and more remote, fierce, passionate, or tender, yet subdued to such awful harmony that I thought of the song that the morning stars sang together and felt as though it were

sounding in my ears. My heart beat to suffocation, the tears burned my lids, the joy, the mystery of it seemed too intolerable to be borne. I could not understand even then the words of the song; but I knew that if there had been someone at my side who could have heard it with me, we might have found the key to it together.

“I turned to my husband, who was sitting beside me in an attitude of patient dejection, gazing into the bottom of his hat; but at that moment he rose, and stretching his stiffened legs, said, mildly: ‘Hadh’t we better be going? There doesn’t seem to be much to see here, and you know the table d’hôte dinner is at half-past six o’clock.’”

Her recital ended, there was an interval of silence; then the Spirit of Life said: “There is a compensation in store for such needs as you have expressed.”

“Oh, then you *do* understand?” she exclaimed. “Tell me what compensation, I entreat you!”

“It is ordained,” the Spirit answered, “that every soul which seeks in vain on earth for a kindred soul to whom it can lay bare its inmost being shall find that soul here and be united to it for eternity.”

A glad cry broke from her lips. “Ah, shall I find him at last?” she cried, exultant.

“He is here,” said the Spirit of Life.

She looked up and saw that a man stood near whose soul (for in that unwonted light she seemed to see his soul more clearly than his face) drew her toward him with an invincible force.

“Are you really he?” she murmured.

“I am he,” he answered.

She laid her hand in his and drew him toward the parapet which overhung the valley.

“Shall we go down together,” she asked him, “into that marvellous country; shall we see it together, as if with the selfsame eyes, and tell each other in the same words all that we think and feel?”

"So," he replied, "have I hoped and dreamed."

"What?" she asked, with rising joy. "Then you, too, have looked for me?"

"All my life."

"How wonderful! And did you never, never find anyone in the other world who understood you?"

"Not wholly—not as you and I understand each other."

"Then you feel it, too? Oh, I am happy," she sighed.

They stood, hand in hand, looking down over the parapet upon the shimmering landscape which stretched forth beneath them into sapphirine space, and the Spirit of Life, who kept watch near the threshold, heard now and then a floating fragment of their talk blown backward like the stray swallows which the wind sometimes separates from their migratory tribe.

"Did you never feel at sunset——"

"Ah, yes; but I never heard anyone else say so. Did you?"

"Do you remember that line in the third canto of the 'Inferno?' "

"Ah, that line—my favorite always. Is it possible——"

"You know the stooping Victory in the frieze of the Nike Apteros?"

"You mean the one who is tying her sandal? Then you have noticed, too, that all Botticelli and Mantegna are dormant in those flying folds of her drapery?"

"After a storm in autumn have you never seen——"

"Yes, it is curious how certain flowers suggest certain painters—the perfume of the carnation, Leonardo; that of the rose, Titian; the tuberose, Crivelli——"

"I never supposed that anyone else had noticed it."

"Have you never thought——"

"Oh, yes, often and often; but I never dreamed that anyone else had."

"But surely you must have felt——"

"Oh, yes, yes; and you, too——"

"How beautiful! How strange——"

Their voices rose and fell, like the murmur of two fountains answering each other across a garden full of flowers. At length, with a certain tender impatience, he turned to her and said: "Love, why should we linger here? All eternity lies before us. Let us go down into that beautiful country together and make a home for ourselves on some blue hill above the shining river."

As he spoke, the hand she had forgotten in his was suddenly withdrawn, and he felt that a cloud was passing over the radiance of her soul.

"A home," she repeated, slowly, "a home for you and me to live in for all eternity?"

"Why not, love? Am I not the soul that yours has sought?"

"Y-yes—yes, I know—but, don't you see, home would not be like home to me, unless——"

"Unless?" he wonderingly repeated.

She did not answer, but she thought to herself, with an impulse of whimsical inconsistency, "Unless you slammed the door and wore creaking boots."

But he had recovered his hold upon her hand, and by imperceptible degrees was leading her toward the shining steps which descended to the valley.

"Come, O my soul's soul," he passionately implored; "why delay a moment? Surely you feel, as I do, that eternity itself is too short to hold such bliss as ours. It seems to me that I can see our home already. Have I not always seen it in my dreams? It is white, love, is it not, with polished columns, and a sculptured cornice against the blue? Groves of laurel and oleander and thickets of roses surround it; but from the terrace where we walk at sunset, the eye looks out over woodlands and cool meadows where, deep-bowered under ancient boughs, a stream goes delicately toward the river. Indoors our favorite pictures hang upon the walls and the rooms are lined with books. Think, dear, at last we shall have time to read them all. With which shall we begin? Come, help me to choose. Shall it be 'Faust' or

the 'Vita Nuova,' the 'Tempest' or 'Les Caprices de Marianne,' or the thirty-first canto of the 'Paradise,' or 'Epipsychidion' or 'Lycidas'? Tell me, dear, which one?"

As he spoke he saw the answer trembling joyously upon her lips; but it died in the ensuing silence, and she stood motionless, resisting the persuasion of his hand.

"What is it?" he entreated.

"Wait a moment," she said, with a strange hesitation in her voice. "Tell me first, are you quite sure of yourself? Is there no one on earth whom you sometimes remember?"

"Not since I have seen you," he replied; for, being a man, he had indeed forgotten.

Still she stood motionless, and he saw that the shadow deepened on her soul.

"Surely, love," he rebuked her, "it was not that which troubled you? For my part I have walked through Lethe. The past has melted like a cloud before the moon. I never lived until I saw you."

She made no answer to his pleadings, but at length, rousing herself with a visible effort, she turned away from him and moved toward the Spirit of Life, who still stood near the threshold.

"I want to ask you a question," she said, in a troubled voice.

"Ask," said the Spirit.

"A little while ago," she began, slowly, "you told me that every soul which has not found a kindred soul on earth is destined to find one here."

"And have you not found one?" asked the Spirit.

"Yes; but will it be so with my husband's soul also?"

"No," answered the Spirit of Life, "for your husband imagined that he had found his soul's mate on earth in you; and for such delusions eternity itself contains no cure."

She gave a little cry. Was it of disappointment or triumph?

"Then—then what will happen to him when he comes here?"

"That I cannot tell you. Some field of activity and happiness he

will doubtless find, in due measure to his capacity for being active and happy."

She interrupted, almost angrily: "He will never be happy without me."

"Do not be too sure of that," said the Spirit.

She took no notice of this, and the Spirit continued: "He will not understand you here any better than he did on earth."

"No matter," she said; "I shall be the only sufferer, for he always thought that he understood me."

"His boots will creak just as much as ever——"

"No matter."

"And he will slam the door——"

"Very likely."

"And continue to read railway novels——"

She interposed, impatiently: "Many men do worse than that."

"But you said just now," said the Spirit, "that you did not love him."

"True," she answered, simply; "but don't you understand that I shouldn't feel at home without him? It is all very well for a week or two—but for eternity! After all, I never minded the creaking of his boots, except when my head ached, and I don't suppose it will ache *here*; and he was always so sorry when he had slammed the door, only he never *could* remember not to. Besides, no one else would know how to look after him, he is so helpless. His inkstand would never be filled, and he would always be out of stamps and visiting-cards. He would never remember to have his umbrella re-covered, or to ask the price of anything before he bought it. Why, he wouldn't even know what novels to read. I always had to choose the kind he liked, with a murder or a forgery and a successful detective."

She turned abruptly to her kindred soul, who stood listening with a mien of wonder and dismay.

"Don't you see," she said, "that I can't possibly go with you?"

"But what do you intend to do?" asked the Spirit of Life.

“What do I intend to do?” she returned, indignantly. “Why, I mean to wait for my husband, of course. If he had come here first *he* would have waited for me for years and years; and it would break his heart not to find me here when he comes.” She pointed with a contemptuous gesture to the magic vision of hill and vale sloping away to the translucent mountains. “He wouldn’t give a fig for all that,” she said, “if he didn’t find me here.”

“But consider,” warned the Spirit, “that you are now choosing for eternity. It is a solemn moment.”

“Choosing!” she said, with a half-sad smile. “Do you still keep up here that old fiction about choosing? I should have thought that *you* knew better than that. How can I help myself? He will expect to find me here when he comes, and he would never believe you if you told him that I had gone away with someone else—never, never.”

“So be it,” said the Spirit. “Here, as on earth, each one must decide for himself.”

She turned to her kindred soul and looked at him gently, almost wistfully. “I am sorry,” she said. “I should have liked to talk with you again; but you will understand, I know, and I dare say you will find someone else a great deal cleverer——”

And without pausing to hear his answer she waved him a swift farewell and turned back toward the threshold.

“Will my husband come soon?” she asked the Spirit of Life.

“That you are not destined to know,” the Spirit replied.

“No matter,” she said, cheerfully; “I have all eternity to wait in.”

And still seated alone on the threshold, she listens for the creaking of his boots.

The Lamp of Psyche

DELIA CORBETT was too happy; her happiness frightened her. Not on theological grounds, however; she was sure that people had a right to be happy; but she was equally sure that it was a right seldom recognized by destiny. And her happiness almost touched the confines of pain—it bordered on that sharp ecstasy which she had known, through one sleepless night after another, when what had now become a reality had haunted her as an unattainable longing.

Delia Corbett was not in the habit of using what the French call *gros mots* in the rendering of her own emotions; she took herself, as a rule, rather flippantly, with a dash of contemptuous pity. But she felt that she had now entered upon a phase of existence wherein it became her to pay herself an almost reverential regard. Love had set his golden crown upon her forehead, and the awe of the office allotted her subdued her doubting heart. To her had been given the one portion denied to all other women on earth, the immense, the unapproachable privilege of becoming Laurence Corbett's wife.

Here she burst out laughing at the sound of her own thoughts, and rising from her seat walked across the drawing-room and looked at herself in the mirror above the mantelpiece. She was past thirty and had never been very pretty; but she knew herself to be capable of loving her husband better and pleasing him longer than any other woman in the world. She was not afraid of rivals; he and she had seen each other's souls.

She turned away, smiling carelessly at her insignificant reflection, and went back to her arm-chair near the balcony. The room in which

she sat was very beautiful; it pleased Corbett to make all his surroundings beautiful. It was the drawing-room of his hotel in Paris, and the balcony near which his wife sat overlooked a small bosky garden framed in ivied walls, with a mouldering terra-cotta statue in the centre of its cup-shaped lawn. They had now been married some two months, and, after travelling for several weeks, had both desired to return to Paris; Corbett because he was really happier there than elsewhere, Delia because she passionately longed to enter as a wife the house where she had so often come and gone as a guest. How she used to find herself dreaming in the midst of one of Corbett's delightful dinners (to which she and her husband were continually being summoned) of a day when she might sit at the same table, but facing its master, a day when no carriage should wait to whirl her away from the brightly lit porte-cochère, and when, after the guests had gone, he and she should be left alone in his library, and she might sit down beside him and put her hand in his! The high-minded reader may infer from this that I am presenting him, in the person of Delia Corbett, with a heroine whom he would not like his wife to meet; but how many of us could face each other in the calm consciousness of moral rectitude if our inmost desire were not hidden under a convenient garb of lawful observance?

Delia Corbett, as Delia Benson, had been a very good wife to her first husband; some people (Corbett among them) had even thought her laxly tolerant of "poor Benson's" weaknesses. But then she knew her own; and it is admitted that nothing goes so far toward making us blink the foibles of others as the wish to have them extend a like mercy to ourselves. Not that Delia's foibles were of a tangible nature; they belonged to the order which escapes analysis by the coarse process of our social standards. Perhaps their very immateriality, the consciousness that she could never be brought to book for them before any human tribunal, made her the more restive under their weight; for she was of a nature to prefer buying her happiness to stealing it. But her rising scruples were perpetually being allayed by

some fresh indiscretion of Benson's, to which she submitted with an undeviating amiability which flung her into the opposite extreme of wondering if she didn't really influence him to do wrong—if she mightn't help him to do better. All these psychological subtleties exerted, however, no influence over her conduct which, since the day of her marriage, had been a model of delicate circumspection. It was only necessary to look at Benson to see that the most eager reformer could have done little to improve him. In the first place he must have encountered the initial difficulty, most disheartening to reformers, of making his neophyte distinguish between right and wrong. Undoubtedly it was within the measure even of Benson's primitive perceptions to recognize that some actions were permissible and others were not; but his sole means of classifying them was to try both, and then deny having committed those of which his wife disapproved. Delia had once owned a poodle who greatly desired to sleep on a white fur rug which she destined to other uses. She and the poodle disagreed on the subject, and the latter, though submitting to her authority (when reinforced by a whip), could never be made to see the justice of her demand, and consequently (as the rug frequently revealed) never missed an opportunity of evading it when her back was turned. Her husband often reminded her of the poodle, and, not having a whip or its moral equivalent to control him with, she had long since resigned herself to seeing him smudge the whiteness of her early illusions. The worst of it was that her resignation was such a cheap virtue. She had to be perpetually rousing herself to a sense of Benson's enormities; through the ever-lengthening perspective of her indifference they looked as small as the details of a landscape seen through the wrong end of a telescope. Now and then she tried to remind herself that she had married him for love; but she was well aware that the sentiment she had once entertained for him had nothing in common with the state of mind which the words now represented to her; and this naturally diminished the force of the argument. She had married him at

nineteen, because he had beautiful blue eyes and always wore a gardenia in his coat; really, as far as she could remember, these considerations had been the determining factors in her choice. Delia as a child (her parents were since dead) had been a much-indulged daughter, with a liberal allowance of pocket-money, and permission to spend it unquestioned and unadvised. Subsequently, she used sometimes to look, in a critical humor, at the various articles which she had purchased in her teens; futile chains and locket, valueless china knick-knacks, and poor engravings of sentimental pictures. These, as a chastisement to her taste, she religiously preserved; and they often made her think of Benson. No one, she could not but reflect, would have blamed her if, with the acquirement of a fuller discrimination, she had thrown them all out of the window and replaced them by some object of permanent merit; but she was expected not only to keep Benson for life, but to conceal the fact that her taste had long since discarded him.

It could hardly be expected that a woman who reasoned so dispassionately about her mistakes should attempt to deceive herself about her preferences. Corbett personified all those finer amenities of mind and manners which may convert the mere act of being into a beneficent career; to Delia he seemed the most admirable man she had ever met, and she would have thought it disloyal to her best aspirations not to admire him. But she did not attempt to palliate her warmer feeling under the mask of a plausible esteem; she knew that she loved him, and scorned to disavow that also. So well, however, did she keep her secret that Corbett himself never suspected it, until her husband's death freed her from the obligation of concealment. Then, indeed, she gloried in its confession; and after two years of widowhood, and more than two months of marriage, she was still under the spell of that moment of exquisite avowal.

She was reliving it now, as she often did in the rare hours which separated her from her husband; when presently she heard his step on the stairs, and started up with the blush of eighteen. As she

walked across the room to meet him she asked herself perversely (she was given to such obliqueness of self-scrutiny) if to a dispassionate eye he would appear as complete, as supremely well-equipped as she beheld him, or if she walked in a cloud of delusion, dense as the god-concealing mist of Homer. But whenever she put this question to herself, Corbett's appearance instantly relegated it to the limbo of solved enigmas; he was so obviously admirable that she wondered that people didn't stop her in the street to attest her good fortune.

As he came forward now, this renewal of satisfaction was so strong in her that she felt an impulse to seize him and assure herself of his reality; he was so perilously like the phantasms of joy which had mocked her dissatisfied past. But his coat-sleeve was convincingly tangible; and, pinching it, she felt the muscles beneath.

"What—all alone?" he said, smiling back her welcome.

"No, I wasn't—I was with you!" she exclaimed; then fearing to appear fatuous, added, with a slight shrug, "Don't be alarmed—it won't last."

"That's what frightens me," he answered, gravely.

"Precisely," she laughed; "and I shall take good care not to reassure you!"

They stood face to face for a moment, reading in each other's eyes the completeness of their communion; then he broke the silence by saying, "By the way, I'd forgotten; here's a letter for you."

She took it unregardingly, her eyes still deep in his; but as her glance turned to the envelope she uttered a note of pleasure.

"Oh, how nice—it's from your only rival!"

"Your Aunt Mary?"

She nodded. "I haven't heard from her in a month—and I'm afraid I haven't written to her either. You don't know how many beneficent intentions of mine you divert from their proper channels."

"But your Aunt Mary has had you all your life—I've only had you two months," he objected.

Delia was still contemplating the letter with a smile. "Dear thing!" she murmured. "I wonder when I shall see her?"

"Write and ask her to come and spend the winter with us."

"What—and leave Boston, and her kindergartens, and associated charities, and symphony concerts, and debating clubs?"

You don't know Aunt Mary!"

"No, I don't. It seems so incongruous that you should adore such a bundle of pedantries."

"I forgive that, because you've never seen her. How I wish you could!"

He stood looking down at her with the all-promising smile of the happy lover. "Well, if she won't come to us we'll go to her."

"Laurence—and leave this!"

"It will keep—we'll come back to it. My dear girl, don't beam so; you make me feel as if you hadn't been happy until now."

"No—but it's your thinking of it!"

"I'll do more than think; I'll act; I'll take you to Boston to see your Aunt Mary."

"Oh, Laurence, you'd hate doing it."

"Not doing it together."

She laid her hand for a moment on his. "What a difference that does make in things!" she said, as she broke the seal of the letter.

"Well, I'll leave you to commune with Aunt Mary. When you've done, come and find me in the library."

Delia sat down joyfully to the perusal of her letter, but as her eye travelled over the closely written pages her gratified expression turned to one of growing concern; and presently, thrusting it back into the envelope, she followed her husband to the library. It was a charming room and singularly indicative, to her fancy, of its occupant's character; the expanse of harmonious bindings, the fruity bloom of Renaissance bronzes, and the imprisoned sunlight of two or three old pictures fitly epitomizing the delicate ramifications of her husband's taste. But now her glance lingered less appreciatively than

usual on the warm tones and fine lines which formed so expressive a background for Corbett's fastidious figure.

"Aunt Mary has been ill—I'm afraid she's been seriously ill," she announced as he rose to receive her. "She fell in coming down-stairs from one of her tenement-house inspections, and it brought on water on the knee. She's been laid up ever since—some three or four weeks now. I'm afraid it's rather bad at her age; and I don't know how she will resign herself to keeping quiet."

"I'm very sorry," said Corbett, sympathetically; "but water on the knee isn't dangerous, you know."

"No—but the doctor says she mustn't go out for weeks and weeks; and that will drive her mad. She'll think the universe has come to a standstill."

"She'll find it hasn't," suggested Corbett, with a smile which took the edge from his comment.

"Ah, but such discoveries hurt—especially if one makes them late in life!"

Corbett stood looking affectionately at his wife.

"How long is it," he asked, "since you have seen your Aunt Mary?"

"I think it must be two years. Yes, just two years; you know I went home on business after——" She stopped; they never alluded to her first marriage.

Corbett took her hand. "Well," he declared, glancing rather wistfully at the Paris Bordone above the mantel-piece, "we'll sail next month and pay her a little visit."

II

Corbett was really making an immense concession in going to America at that season; he disliked the prospect at all times, but just as his hotel in Paris had reopened its luxurious arms to him for the winter, the thought of departure was peculiarly distasteful. Delia knew it, and winced under the enormity of the sacrifice which he had imposed upon himself; but he bore the burden so lightly, and so

smilingly derided her impulse to magnify the heroism of his conduct, that she gradually yielded to the undisturbed enjoyment of her anticipations. She was really very glad to be returning to Boston as Corbett's wife; her occasional appearances there as Mrs. Benson had been so eminently unsatisfactory to herself and her relatives that she naturally desired to efface them by so triumphal a re-entry. She had passed so great a part of her own life in Europe that she viewed with a secret leniency Corbett's indifference to his native land; but though she did not mind his not caring for his country she was intensely anxious that his country should care for him. He was a New Yorker, and entirely unknown, save by name, to her little circle of friends and relatives in Boston; but she reflected, with tranquil satisfaction, that, if he were cosmopolitan enough for Fifth Avenue, he was also cultured enough for Beacon Street. She was not so confident of his being altruistic enough for Aunt Mary; but Aunt Mary's appreciations covered so wide a range that there seemed small doubt of his coming under the head of one of her manifold enthusiasms.

Altogether Delia's anticipations grew steadily rosier with the approach to Sandy Hook; and to her confident eye the Statue of Liberty, as they passed under it in the red brilliance of a winter sunrise, seemed to look down upon Corbett with her Aunt Mary's most approving smile.

Delia's Aunt Mary—known from the Back Bay to the South End as Mrs. Mason Hayne—had been the chief formative influence of her niece's youth. Delia, after the death of her parents, had even spent two years under Mrs. Hayne's roof, in direct contact with all her apostolic ardors, her inflammatory zeal for righteousness in everything from baking-powder to municipal government; and though the girl never felt any inclination to interpret her aunt's influence in action, it was potent in modifying her judgment of herself and others. Her parents had been incurably frivolous, Mrs. Hayne was incurably serious, and Delia, by some unconscious powers of selection, tended to frivolity of conduct, corrected by seriousness

of thought. She would have shrunk from the life of unadorned activity, the unsmiling pursuit of Purposes with a capital letter, to which Mrs. Hayne's energies were dedicated; but it lent relief to her enjoyment of the purposeless to measure her own conduct by her aunt's utilitarian standards. This curious sympathy with aims so at variance with her own ideals would hardly have been possible to Delia had Mrs. Hayne been a narrow enthusiast without visual range beyond the blinders of her own vocation; it was the consciousness that her aunt's perceptions included even such obvious inutility as hers which made her so tolerant of her aunt's usefulness. All this she had tried, on the way across the Atlantic, to put vividly before Corbett; but she was conscious of a vague inability on his part to adjust his conception of Mrs. Hayne to his wife's view of her; and Delia could only count on her aunt's abounding personality to correct the one-sidedness of his impression.

Mrs. Hayne lived in a wide brick house on Mount Vernon Street, which had belonged to her parents and grandparents, and from which she had never thought of moving. Thither, on the evening of their arrival in Boston, the Corbetts were driven from the Providence Station. Mrs. Hayne had written to her niece that Cyrus would meet them with a "hack;" Cyrus was a sable factotum designated in Mrs. Hayne's vocabulary as a "chore-man." When the train entered the station he was, in fact, conspicuous on the platform, his smile shining like an open piano, while he proclaimed with abundant gesture the proximity of "de hack," and Delia, descending from the train into his dusky embrace, found herself guiltily wishing that he could have been omitted from the function of their arrival. She could not help wondering what her husband's valet would think of him. The valet was to be lodged at a hotel: Corbett himself had suggested that his presence might disturb the routine of Mrs. Hayne's household, a view in which Delia had eagerly acquiesced. There was, however, no possibility of dissembling Cyrus, and under the valet's depreciatory eye the Corbetts suffered him to precede them to the livery-stable

landau, with blue shades and a confidentially disposed driver, which awaited them outside the station.

During the drive to Mount Vernon Street Delia was silent; but as they approached her aunt's swell-fronted domicile she said, hurriedly, "You won't like the house."

Corbett laughed. "It's the inmate I've come to see," he commented.

"Oh, I'm not afraid of her," Delia almost too confidently rejoined.

The parlor-maid who admitted them to the hall (a discouraging hall, with a large-patterned oil-cloth and buff walls stencilled with a Greek border) informed them that Mrs. Hayne was above; and ascending to the next floor they found her genial figure, supported on crutches, awaiting them at the drawing-room door. Mrs. Hayne was a tall, stoutish woman, whose bland expanse of feature was accentuated by a pair of gray eyes of such surpassing penetration that Delia often accused her of answering people's thoughts before they had finished thinking them. These eyes, through the close fold of Delia's embrace, pierced instantly to Corbett, and never had that accomplished gentleman been more conscious of being called upon to present his credentials. But there was no reservation in the uncritical warmth of Mrs. Hayne's welcome, and it was obvious that she was unaffectedly happy in their coming.

She led them into the drawing-room, still clinging to Delia, and Corbett, as he followed, understood why his wife had said that he would not like the house. One saw at a glance that Mrs. Hayne had never had time to think of her house or her dress. Both were scrupulously neat, but her gown might have been an unaltered one of her mother's, and her drawing-room wore the same appearance of contented archaism. There was a sufficient number of arm-chairs, and the tables (mostly marble-topped) were redeemed from monotony by their freight of books; but it had not occurred to Mrs. Hayne to substitute logs for hard coal in her fireplace, nor to replace by more personal works of art the smoky expanses of canvas "after" Raphael and Murillo which lurched heavily forward from the walls.

She had even preserved the knotty antimacassars on her high-backed armchairs, and Corbett, who was growing bald, resignedly reflected that during his stay in Mount Vernon Street he should not be able to indulge in any lounging.

III

Delia held back for three days the question which burned her lip; then, following her husband upstairs after an evening during which Mrs. Hayne had proved herself especially comprehensive (even questioning Corbett upon the tendencies of modern French art), she let escape the imminent "Well?"

"She's charming," Corbett returned, with the fine smile which always seemed like a delicate criticism.

"Really?"

"Really, Delia. Do you think me so narrow that I can't value such a character as your aunt's simply because it's cast in different lines from mine? I once told you that she must be a bundle of pedantries, and you prophesied that my first sight of her would correct that impression. You were right; she's a bundle of extraordinary vitalities. I never saw a woman more thoroughly alive; and that's the great secret of living—to be thoroughly alive."

"I knew it; I knew it!" his wife exclaimed. "Two such people couldn't help liking each other."

"Oh, I should think she might very well help liking me."

"She doesn't; she admires you immensely; but why?"

"Well, I don't precisely fit into any of her ideals, and the worst part of having ideals is that the people who don't fit into them have to be discarded."

"Aunt Mary doesn't discard anybody," Delia interpolated.

"Her heart may not, but I fancy her judgment does."

"But she doesn't exactly fit into any of your ideals, and yet you like her," his wife persisted.

"I haven't any ideals," Corbett lightly responded. "*Je prends mon*

bien où je le trouve; and I find a great deal in your Aunt Mary.”

Delia did not ask Mrs. Hayne what she thought of her husband; she was sure that, in due time, her aunt would deliver her verdict; it was impossible for her to leave any one unclassified. Perhaps, too, there was a latent cowardice in Delia's reticence; an unacknowledged dread lest Mrs. Hayne should range Corbett among the intermediate types.

After a day or two of mutual inspection and adjustment the three lives under Mrs. Hayne's roof lapsed into their separate routines. Mrs. Hayne once more set in motion the complicated machinery of her own existence (rendered more intricate by the accident of her lameness), and Corbett and his wife began to dine out and return the visits of their friends. There were, however, some hours which Corbett devoted to the club or to the frequentation of the public libraries, and these Delia gave to her aunt, driving with Mrs. Hayne from one committee meeting to another, writing business letters at her dictation, or reading aloud to her the reports of the various philanthropic, educational, or political institutions in which she was interested. She had been conscious on her arrival of a certain aloofness from her aunt's militant activities; but within a week she was swept back into the strong current of Mrs. Hayne's existence. It was like stepping from a gondola to an ocean steamer; at first she was dazed by the throb of the screw and the rush of the parting waters, but gradually she felt herself infected by the exhilaration of getting to a fixed place in the shortest possible time. She could make sufficient allowance for the versatility of her moods to know that, a few weeks after her return to Paris, all that seemed most strenuous in Mrs. Hayne's occupations would fade to unreality; but that did not defend her from the strong spell of the moment. In its light her own life seemed vacuous, her husband's aims trivial as the subtleties of Chinese ivory carving; and she wondered if he walked in the same revealing flash.

Some three weeks after the arrival of the Corbetts in Mount

Vernon Street it became manifest that Mrs. Hayne had overtaxed her strength and must return for an undetermined period to her lounge. The life of restricted activity to which this necessity condemned her left her an occasional hour of leisure when there seemed no more letters to be dictated, no more reports to be read; and Corbett, always sure to do the right thing, was at hand to speed such unoccupied moments with the ready charm of his talk.

One day when, after sitting with her for some time, he departed to the club, Mrs. Hayne, turning to Delia, who came in to replace him, said, emphatically, "My dear, he's delightful."

"Oh, Aunt Mary, so are you!" burst gratefully from Mrs. Corbett.

Mrs. Hayne smiled. "Have you suspended your judgment of me until now?" she asked.

"No; but your liking each other seems to complete you both."

"Really, Delia, your husband couldn't have put that more gracefully. But sit down and tell me about him."

"Tell you about him?" repeated Delia, thinking of the voluminous letters in which she had enumerated to Mrs. Hayne the sum of her husband's merits.

"Yes," Mrs. Hayne continued, cutting, as she talked, the pages of a report on state lunatic asylums; "for instance, you've never told me why so charming an American has condemned America to the hard fate of being obliged to get on without him."

"You and he will never agree on that point, Aunt Mary," said Mrs. Corbett, coloring.

"Never mind; I rather like listening to reasons that I know beforehand I'm bound to disagree with; it saves so much mental effort. And besides, how can you tell? I'm very uncertain."

"You are very broad-minded, but you'll never understand his just having drifted into it. Any definite reason would seem to you better than that."

"Ah—he drifted into it?"

"Well, yes. You know his sister, who married the Comte de Vitrey

and went to live in Paris, was very unhappy after her marriage; and when Laurence's mother died there was no one left to look after her; and so Laurence went abroad in order to be near her. After a few years Monsieur de Vitrey died too; but by that time Laurence didn't care to come back."

"Well," said Mrs. Hayne, "I see nothing so shocking in that. Your husband can gratify his tastes much more easily in Europe than in America; and, after all, that is what we're all secretly striving to do. I'm sure if there were more lunatic asylums and poor-houses and hospitals in Europe than there are here I should be very much inclined to go and live there myself."

Delia laughed. "I knew you would like Laurence," she said, with a wisdom bred of the event.

"Of course I like him; he's a liberal education. It's very interesting to study the determining motives in such a man's career. How old is your husband, Delia?"

"Laurence is fifty-two."

"And when did he go abroad to look after his sister?"

"Let me see—when he was about twenty-eight; it was in 1867, I think."

"And before that he had lived in America?"

"Yes, the greater part of the time."

"Then of course he was in the war?" Mrs. Hayne continued, laying down her pamphlet. "You've never told me about that. Did he see any active service?"

As she spoke Delia grew pale; for a moment she sat looking blankly at her aunt.

"I don't think he was in the war at all," she said at length, in a low tone.

Mrs. Hayne stared at her. "Oh, you must be mistaken," she said, decidedly. "Why shouldn't he have been in the war? What else could he have been doing?"

Mrs. Corbett was silent. All the men of her family, all the men of

her friends' families, had fought in the war; Mrs. Hayne's husband had been killed at Bull Run, and one of Delia's cousins at Gettysburg. Ever since she could remember it had been regarded as a matter of course by those about her that every man of her husband's generation who was neither lame, halt, nor blind should have fought in the war. Husbands had left their wives, fathers their children, young men their sweethearts, in answer to that summons; and those who had been deaf to it she had never heard designated by any name but one.

But all that had happened long ago; for years it had ceased to be a part of her consciousness. She had forgotten about the war; about her uncle who fell at Bull Run, and her cousin who was killed at Gettysburg. Now, of a sudden, it all came back to her, and she asked herself the question which her aunt had just put to her—why had her husband not been in the war? What else could he have been doing?

But the very word, as she repeated it, struck her as incongruous; Corbett was a man who never did anything. His elaborate intellectual processes bore no flower of result; he simply *was*—but had she not hitherto found that sufficient? She rose from her seat, turning away from Mrs. Hayne.

"I really don't know," she said, coldly. "I never asked him."

IV

Two weeks later the Corbetts returned to Europe. Corbett had really been charmed with his visit, and had in fact shown a marked inclination to outstay the date originally fixed for their departure. But Delia was firm; she did not wish to remain in Boston. She acknowledged that she was sorry to leave her Aunt Mary; but she wanted to get home.

"You turncoat!" Corbett said, laughing. "Two months ago you reserved that sacred designation for Boston."

"One can't tell where it is until one tries," she answered, vaguely.

"You mean that you don't want to come back and live in Boston?"

“Oh, no—no!”

“Very well. But pray take note of the fact that I’m very sorry to leave. Under your Aunt Mary’s tutelage I’m becoming a passionate patriot.”

Delia turned away in silence. She was counting the moments which led to their departure. She longed with an unreasoning intensity to get away from it all; from the dreary house in Mount Vernon Street, with its stencilled hall and hideous drawing-room, its monotonous food served in unappetizing profusion; from the rarefied atmosphere of philanthropy and reform which she had once found so invigorating; and most of all from the reproof of her aunt’s altruistic activities. The recollection of her husband’s delightful house in Paris, so framed for a noble leisure, seemed to mock the æsthetic barrenness of Mrs. Hayne’s environment. Delia thought tenderly of the mellow bindings, the deep-piled rugs, the pictures, bronzes, and tapestries; of the “first nights” at the Français, the eagerly discussed *conférences* on art or literature, the dreaming hours in galleries and museums, and all the delicate enjoyments of the life to which she was returning. It would be like passing from a hospital-ward to a flower-filled drawing-room; how could her husband linger on the threshold?

Corbett, who observed her attentively, noticed that a change had come over her during the last two weeks of their stay in Mount Vernon Street. He wondered uneasily if she were capricious; a man who has formed his own habits upon principles of the finest selection does not care to think that he has married a capricious woman. Then he reflected that the love of Paris is an insidious disease, breaking out when its victim least looks for it, and concluded that Delia was suffering from some such unexpected attack.

Delia certainly was suffering. Ever since Mrs. Hayne had asked her that innocent question—“Why shouldn’t your husband have been in the war?”—she had been repeating it to herself day and night with the monotonous iteration of a monomaniac. Whenever Corbett came

into the room, with that air of giving the simplest act its due value which made episodes of his entrances she was tempted to cry out to him—"Why weren't you in the war?" When she heard him, at a dinner, point one of his polished epigrams, or smilingly demolish the syllogism of an antagonist, her pride in his achievement was chilled by the question—"Why wasn't he in the war?" When she saw him, in the street, give a coin to a crossing-sweeper, or lift his hat ceremoniously to one of Mrs. Hayne's maidservants (he was always considerate of poor people and servants) her approval winced under the reminder—"Why wasn't he in the war?" And when they were alone together, all through the spell of his talk and the exquisite pervasion of his presence ran the embittering undercurrent, "Why wasn't he in the war?"

At times she hated herself for the thought; it seemed a disloyalty to life's best gift. After all, what did it matter now? The war was over and forgotten; it was what the newspapers call "a dead issue." And why should any act of her husband's youth affect their present happiness together? Whatever he might once have been, he was perfect now; admirable in every relation of life; kind, generous, upright; a loyal friend, an accomplished gentleman, and, above all, the man she loved. Yes—but why had he not been in the war? And so began again the reiterant torment of the question. It rose up and lay down with her; it watched with her through sleepless nights, and followed her into the street; it mocked her from the eyes of strangers, and she dreaded lest her husband should read it in her own. In her saner moments she told herself that she was under the influence of a passing mood, which would vanish at the contact of her wonted life in Paris. She had become over-strung in the high air of Mrs. Hayne's moral enthusiasms; all she needed was to descend again to regions of more temperate virtue. This thought increased her impatience to be gone; and the days seemed interminable which divided her from departure.

The return to Paris, however, did not yield the hoped-for

alleviation. The question was still with her, clamoring for a reply, and reinforced, with separation, by the increasing fear of her aunt's unspoken verdict. That shrewd woman had never again alluded to the subject of her brief colloquy with Delia; up to the moment of his farewell she had been unreservedly cordial to Corbett; but she was not the woman to palter with her convictions.

Delia knew what she must think; she knew what name, in the old days, Corbett would have gone by in her aunt's uncompromising circle.

Then came a flash of resistance—the heart's instinct of self-preservation. After all, what did she herself know of her husband's reasons for not being in the war? What right had she to set down to cowardice a course which might have been enforced by necessity, or dictated by unimpeachable motives? Why should she not put to him the question which she was perpetually asking herself? And not having done so, how dared she condemn him unheard?

A month or more passed in this torturing indecision. Corbett had returned with fresh zest to his accustomed way of life, weaned, by his first glimpse of the Champs Elysées, from his factitious enthusiasm for Boston. He and his wife entertained their friends delightfully, and frequented all the "first nights" and "private views" of the season, and Corbett continued to bring back knowing "bits" from the Hôtel Drouot, and rare books from the quays; never had he appeared more cultivated, more decorative and enviable; people agreed that Delia Benson had been uncommonly clever to catch him.

One afternoon he returned later than usual from the club, and, finding his wife alone in the drawing-room, begged her for a cup of tea. Delia reflected, in complying, that she had never seen him look better; his fifty-two years sat upon him like a finish which made youth appear crude, and his voice, as he recounted his afternoon's doings, had the intimate inflections reserved for her ear.

"By the way," he said presently, as he set down his tea-cup, "I had almost forgotten that I've brought you a present— something I

picked up in a little shop in the Rue Bonaparte. Oh, don't look too expectant; it's not a *chef-d'œuvre*; on the contrary, it's about as bad as it can be. But you'll see presently why I bought it."

As he spoke he drew a small, flat parcel from the breast-pocket of his impeccable frock-coat and handed it to his wife.

Delia, loosening the paper which wrapped it, discovered within an oval frame studded with pearls and containing the crudely executed miniature of an unknown young man in the uniform of a United States cavalry officer. She glanced inquiringly at Corbett.

"Turn it over," he said.

She did so, and on the back, beneath two unfamiliar initials, read the brief inscription:

"Fell at Chancellorsville, May 3, 1863."

The blood rushed to her face as she stood gazing at the words.

"You see now why I bought it?" Corbett continued. "All the pieties of one's youth seemed to protest against leaving it in the clutches of a Jew pawnbroker in the Rue Bonaparte. It's awfully bad, isn't it?—but some poor soul might be glad to think that it had passed again into the possession of fellow-countrymen." He took it back from her, bending to examine it critically. "What a daub!" he murmured. "I wonder who he was? Do you suppose that by taking a little trouble one might find out and restore it to his people?"

"I don't know—I dare say," she murmured, absently.

He looked up at the sound of her voice. "What's the matter, Delia? Don't you feel well?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. I was only thinking"—she took the miniature from his hand. "It was kind of you, Laurence, to buy this—it was like you."

"Thanks for the latter clause," he returned, smiling.

Delia stood staring at the vivid flesh-tints of the young man who had fallen at Chancellorsville.

"You weren't very strong at his age, were you, Laurence? Weren't you often ill?" she asked.

Corbett gave her a surprised glance. "Not that I'm aware of," he

said; "I had the measles at twelve, but since then I've been unromantically robust."

"And you—you were in America until you came abroad to be with your sister?"

"Yes—barring a trip of a few weeks in Europe."

Delia looked again at the miniature; then she fixed her eyes upon her husband's.

"Then why weren't you in the war?" she said.

Corbett answered her gaze for a moment; then his lids dropped, and he shifted his position slightly.

"Really," he said, with a smile, "I don't think I know." They were the very words which she had used in answering her aunt.

"You don't know?" she repeated, the question leaping out like an electric shock. "What do you mean when you say that you don't know?"

"Well—it all happened some time ago," he answered, still smiling, "and the truth is that I've completely forgotten the excellent reasons that I doubtless had at the time for remaining at home."

"Reasons for remaining at home? But there were none; every man of your age went to the war; no one stayed at home who wasn't lame, or blind, or deaf, or ill, or——" Her face blazed, her voice broke passionately.

Corbett looked at her with rising amazement.

"Or——?" he said.

"Or a coward," she flashed out. The miniature dropped from her hands, falling loudly on the polished floor.

The two confronted each other in silence; Corbett was very pale.

"I've told you," he said, at length, "that I was neither lame, deaf, blind, nor ill. Your classification is so simple that it will be easy for you to draw your own conclusion."

And very quietly, with that admirable air which always put him in the right, he walked out of the room. Delia, left alone, bent down and picked up the miniature; its protecting crystal had been broken

by the fall. She pressed it close to her and burst into tears.

An hour later, of course, she went to ask her husband's forgiveness. As a woman of sense she could do no less; and her conduct had been so absurd that it was the more obviously pardonable. Corbett, as he kissed her hand, assured her that he had known it was only nervousness; and after dinner, during which he made himself exceptionally agreeable, he proposed their ending the evening at the Palais Royal, where a new play was being given.

Delia had undoubtedly behaved like a fool, and was prepared to do meet penance for her folly by submitting to the gentle sarcasm of her husband's pardon; but when the episode was over, and she realized that she had asked her question and received her answer, she knew that she had passed a milestone in her existence. Corbett was perfectly charming; it was inevitable that he should go on being charming to the end of the chapter. It was equally inevitable that she should go on being in love with him; but her love had undergone a modification which the years were not to efface.

Formerly he had been to her like an unexplored country, full of bewitching surprises and recurrent revelations of wonder and beauty; now she had measured and mapped him, and knew beforehand the direction of every path she trod. His answer to her question had given her the clue to the labyrinth; knowing what he had once done, it seemed quite simple to forecast his future conduct. For that long-past action was still a part of his actual being; he had not outlived or disowned it; he had not even seen that it needed defending.

Her ideal of him was shivered like the crystal above the miniature of the warrior of Chancellorsville. She had the crystal replaced by a piece of clear glass which (as the jeweller pointed out to her) cost much less and looked equally well; and for the passionate worship which she had paid her husband she substituted a tolerant affection which possessed precisely the same advantages.

The Valley of Childish Things, and Other Emblems

ONCE upon a time a number of children lived together in the Valley of Childish Things, playing all manner of delightful games, and studying the same lesson-books. But one day a little girl, one of their number, decided that it was time to see something of the world about which the lesson-books had taught her; and as none of the other children cared to leave their games, she set out alone to climb the pass which led out of the valley.

It was a hard climb, but at length she reached a cold, bleak table-land beyond the mountains. Here she saw cities and men, and learned many useful arts, and in so doing grew to be a woman. But the table-land was bleak and cold, and when she had served her apprenticeship she decided to return to her old companions in the Valley of Childish Things, and work with them instead of with strangers.

It was a weary way back, and her feet were bruised by the stones, and her face was beaten by the weather; but half way down the pass she met a man, who kindly helped her over the roughest places. Like herself, he was lame and weather-beaten; but as soon as he spoke she recognized him as one of her old playmates. He too had been out in the world, and was going back to the valley; and on the way they talked together of the work they meant to do there. He had been a dull boy, and she had never taken much notice of him; but as she listened to his plans for building bridges and draining swamps and cutting roads through the jungle, she thought to herself, "Since he

has grown into such a fine fellow, what splendid men and women my other playmates must have become!"

But what was her surprise to find, on reaching the valley, that her former companions, instead of growing into men and women, had all remained little children. Most of them were playing the same old games, and the few who affected to be working were engaged in such strenuous occupations as building mudpies and sailing paper boats in basins. As for the lad who had been the favorite companion of her studies, he was playing marbles with all the youngest boys in the valley.

At first the children seemed glad to have her back, but soon she saw that her presence interfered with their games; and when she tried to tell them of the great things that were being done on the table-land beyond the mountains, they picked up their toys and went farther down the valley to play.

Then she turned to her fellow-traveler, who was the only grown man in the valley; but he was on his knees before a dear little girl with blue eyes and a coral necklace, for whom he was making a garden out of cockle-shells and bits of glass, and broken flowers stuck in sand.

The little girl was clapping her hands and crowing (she was too young to speak articulately); and when she who had grown to be a woman laid her hand on the man's shoulder, and asked him if he did not want to set to work with her building bridges, draining swamps, and cutting roads through the jungle, he replied that at that particular moment he was too busy.

And as she turned away, he added in the kindest possible way, "Really, my dear, you ought to have taken better care of your complexion."

II

There was once a maiden lady who lived alone in a commodious brick house facing north and south. The lady was very fond of

warmth and sunshine, but unfortunately her room was on the north side of the house, so that in winter she had no sun at all.

This distressed her so much that, after long deliberation, she sent for an architect, and asked him if it would be possible to turn the house around so that her room should face the south. The architect replied that anything could be done for money; but the estimated cost of turning the house around was so high that the lady, who enjoyed a handsome income, was obliged to reduce her way of living and sell her securities at a sacrifice to raise money enough for the purpose. At length, however, the house was turned around, and she felt almost consoled for her impoverishment by the first ray of sunlight which stole through her shutters the next morning.

That very day she received a visit from an old friend who had been absent a year; and this friend, finding her seated at her window in a flood of sunlight, immediately exclaimed:

“My dear, how sensible of you to have moved into a south room! I never could understand why you persisted so long in living on the north side of the house.”

And the following day the architect sent in his bill.

III

There was once a little girl who was so very intelligent that her parents feared that she would die.

But an aged aunt, who had crossed the Atlantic in a sailing-vessel, said, “My dears, let her marry the first man she falls in love with, and she will make such a fool of herself that it will probably save her life.”

IV

A thinly clad man, who was trudging afoot through a wintry and shelterless region, met another wrapped in a big black cloak. The cloak hung heavily on its wearer, and seemed to drag him back, but

at least it kept off the cold.

“That’s a fine warm cloak you’ve got,” said the first man through his chattering teeth.

“Oh,” said the other, “it’s none of my choosing, I promise you. It’s only my old happiness dyed black and made over into a sorrow; but in this weather a man must wear what he’s got.”

“To think of some people’s luck!” muttered the first man, as the other passed on. “Now I never had enough happiness to make a sorrow out of.”

V

There was once a man who married a sweet little wife; but when he set out with her from her father’s house, he found that she had never been taught to walk. They had a long way to go, and there was nothing for him to do but to carry her; and as he carried her she grew heavier and heavier.

Then they came to a wide, deep river, and he found that she had never been taught to swim. So he told her to hold fast to his shoulder, and started to swim with her across the river. And as he swam she grew frightened, and dragged him down in her struggles. And the river was deep and wide, and the current ran fast; and once or twice she nearly had him under. But he fought his way through, and landed her safely on the other side; and behold, he found himself in a strange country, beyond all imagining delightful. And as he looked about him and gave thanks, he said to himself:

“Perhaps if I hadn’t had to carry her over, I shouldn’t have kept up long enough to get here myself.”

VI

A soul once cowered in a gray waste, and a mighty shape came by. Then the soul cried out for help, saying, “Shall I be left to perish alone in this desert of Unsatisfied Desires?”

“But you are mistaken,” the shape replied; “this is the land of Gratified Longings. And, moreover, you are not alone, for the country is full of people; but whoever tarries here grows blind.”

VII

There was once a very successful architect who made a great name for himself. At length he built a magnificent temple, to which he devoted more time and thought than to any of the other buildings he had erected; and the world pronounced it his masterpiece. Shortly afterward he died, and when he came before the judgment angel he was not asked how many sins he had committed, but how many houses he had built.

He hung his head and said, more than he could count. The judgment angel asked what they were like, and the architect said that he was afraid they were pretty bad. “And are you sorry?” asked the angel.

“Very sorry,” said the architect, with honest contrition.

“And how about that famous temple that you built just before you died?” the angel continued. “Are you satisfied with that?”

“Oh, no,” the architect exclaimed. “I really think it has some good points about it,—I did try my best, you know,—but there’s one dreadful mistake that I’d give my soul to go back and rectify.”

“Well,” said the angel, “you can’t go back and rectify it, but you can take your choice of the following alternatives: either we can let the world go on thinking your temple a masterpiece and you the greatest architect that ever lived, or we can send to earth a young fellow we’ve got here who will discover your mistake at a glance, and point it out so clearly to posterity that you’ll be the laughing-stock of all succeeding generations of architects. Which do you choose?”

“Oh, well,” said the architect, “if it comes to that, you know—as long as it suits my clients as it is, I really don’t see the use of making such a fuss.”

A man once married a charming young person who agreed with him on every question. At first they were very happy, for the man thought his wife the most interesting companion he had ever met, and they spent their days telling each other what wonderful people they were. But by and by the man began to find his wife rather tiresome. Wherever he went she insisted upon going; whatever he did, she was sure to tell him that it would have been better to do the opposite; and moreover, it gradually dawned upon him that his friends had never thought so highly of her as he did. Having made this discovery, he naturally felt justified in regarding himself as the aggrieved party; she took the same view of her situation, and their life was one of incessant recrimination.

Finally, after years spent in violent quarrels and short-lived reconciliations, the man grew weary, and decided to divorce his wife.

He engaged an able lawyer, who assured him that he would have no difficulty in obtaining a divorce; but to his surprise, the judge refused to grant it.

“But—” said the man, and he began to recapitulate his injuries.

“That’s all very true,” said the judge, “and nothing would be easier than for you to obtain a divorce if you had only married another person.”

“What do you mean by another person?” asked the man in astonishment.

“Well,” replied the judge, “it appears that you inadvertently married yourself; that is a union no court has the power to dissolve.”

“Oh,” said the man; and he was secretly glad, for in his heart he was already longing to make it up again with his wife.

There was once a gentleman who greatly disliked to assume any responsibility. Being possessed of ample means and numerous poor

relatives, he might have indulged a variety of tastes and even a few virtues; but since there is no occupation that does not bring a few cares in its train, this gentleman resolutely refrained from doing anything.

He ceased to visit his old mother, who lived in the country, because it made him nervous to catch the train; he subscribed to no charities because it was a bother to write the checks; he received no visits because he did not wish to be under the obligation of returning them; he invited no guests to stay with him, for fear of being bored before they left; he gave no presents because it was so troublesome to choose them; finally, he even gave up asking his friends to dine because it was such a nuisance to tell the cook that they were coming.

This gentleman took an honest pride in his complete detachment from the trivial importunities of life, and was never tired of ridiculing those who complained of the weight of their responsibilities, justly remarking that if they really wished to be their own masters they had only to follow his example.

One day, however, one of his servants carelessly left the front door open, and Death walked in unannounced, and begged the gentleman to come along as quickly as possible, as there were a good many more people to be called for that afternoon.

“But I can’t,” cried the gentleman, in dismay. “I really can’t, you know. I—why, I’ve asked some people to dine with me this evening.”

“That’s a little too much,” said Death. And the devil carried the gentleman off in a big black bag.

X

There was once a man who had seen the Parthenon, and he wished to build his god a temple like it.

But he was not a skilful man, and, try as he would, he could produce only a mud hut thatched with straw; and he sat down and wept because he could not build a temple for his god.

But one who passed by said to him:

“There are two worse plights than yours. One is to have no god; the other is to build a mud hut and mistake it for the Parthenon.”

The Muse's Tragedy

DANYERS afterwards liked to fancy that he had recognized Mrs. Anerton at once; but that, of course, was absurd, since he had seen no portrait of her—she affected a strict anonymity, refusing even her photograph to the most privileged—and from Mrs. Memorall, whom he revered and cultivated as her friend, he had extracted but the one impressionist phrase: “Oh, well, she’s like one of those old prints where the lines have the value of color.”

He was almost certain, at all events, that he had been thinking of Mrs. Anerton as he sat over his breakfast in the empty hotel restaurant, and that, looking up on the approach of the lady who seated herself at the table near the window, he had said to himself, “*That might be she.*”

Ever since his Harvard days—he was still young enough to think of them as immensely remote—Danyers had dreamed of Mrs. Anerton, the Silvia of Vincent Rendle’s immortal sonnet-cycle, the Mrs. A. of the *Life and Letters*. Her name was enshrined in some of the noblest English verse of the nineteenth century—and of all past or future centuries, as Danyers, from the stand-point of a maturer judgment, still believed. The first reading of certain poems—of the *Antinous*, the *Pia Tolomei*, the *Sonnets to Silvia*,—had been epochs in Danyers’s growth, and the verse seemed to gain in mellowness, in amplitude, in meaning as one brought to its interpretation more experience of life, a finer emotional sense. Where, in his boyhood, he had felt only the perfect, the almost austere beauty of form, the subtle interplay of vowel-sounds, the rush and fulness of lyric emotion, he now thrilled

to the close-packed significance of each line, the allusiveness of each word—his imagination lured hither and thither on fresh trails of thought, and perpetually spurred by the sense that, beyond what he had already discovered, more marvellous regions lay waiting to be explored. Danyers had written, at college, the prize essay on Rendle's poetry (it chanced to be the moment of the great man's death); he had fashioned the fugitive verse of his own storm-and-stress period on the forms which Rendle had first given to English metre; and when two years later the *Life and Letters* appeared, and the Silvia of the sonnets took substance as Mrs. A., he had included in his worship of Rendle the woman who had inspired not only such divine verse but such playful, tender, incomparable prose.

Danyers never forgot the day when Mrs. Memorall happened to mention that she knew Mrs. Anerton. He had known Mrs. Memorall for a year or more, and had somewhat contemptuously classified her as the kind of woman who runs cheap excursions to celebrities; when one afternoon she remarked, as she put a second lump of sugar in his tea:

"Is it right this time? You're almost as particular as Mary Anerton."

"Mary Anerton?"

"Yes, I never *can* remember how she likes her tea. Either it's lemon *with* sugar, or lemon without sugar, or cream without either, and whichever it is must be put into the cup before the tea is poured in; and if one hasn't remembered, one must begin all over again. I suppose it was Vincent Rendle's way of taking his tea and has become a sacred rite."

"Do you *know* Mrs. Anerton?" cried Danyers, disturbed by this careless familiarity with the habits of his divinity.

"'And did I once see Shelley plain?' Mercy, yes! She and I were at school together—she's an American, you know. We were at a *pension* near Tours for nearly a year; then she went back to New York, and I didn't see her again till after her marriage. She and Anerton spent a winter in Rome while my husband was attached to our Legation

there, and she used to be with us a great deal." Mrs. Memorall smiled reminiscently. "It was *the* winter."

"The winter they first met?"

"Precisely—but unluckily I left Rome just before the meeting took place. Wasn't it too bad? I might have been in the *Life and Letters*. You know he mentions that stupid Madame Vodki, at whose house he first saw her."

"And did you see much of her after that?"

"Not during Rendle's life. You know she has lived in Europe almost entirely, and though I used to see her off and on when I went abroad, she was always so engrossed, so preoccupied, that one felt one wasn't wanted. The fact is, she cared only about his friends—she separated herself gradually from all her own people. Now, of course, it's different; she's desperately lonely; she's taken to writing to me now and then; and last year, when she heard I was going abroad, she asked me to meet her in Venice, and I spent a week with her there."

"And Rendle?"

Mrs. Memorall smiled and shook her head. "Oh, I never was allowed a peep at *him*; none of her old friends met him, except by accident. Ill-natured people say that was the reason she kept him so long. If one happened in while he was there, he was hustled into Anerton's study, and the husband mounted guard till the inopportune visitor had departed. Anerton, you know, was really much more ridiculous about it than his wife. Mary was too clever to lose her head, or at least to show she'd lost it—but Anerton couldn't conceal his pride in the conquest. I've seen Mary shiver when he spoke of Rendle as *our poet*. Rendle always had to have a certain seat at the dinner-table, away from the draught and not too near the fire, and a box of cigars that no one else was allowed to touch, and a writing-table of his own in Mary's sittingroom—and Anerton was always telling one of the great man's idiosyncrasies: how he never would cut the ends of his cigars, though Anerton himself had given him a gold cutter set with a star-sapphire, and how untidy his writing-table was,

and how the house-maid had orders always to bring the wastepaper basket to her mistress before emptying it, lest some immortal verse should be thrown into the dust-bin.”

“The Anertons never separated, did they?”

“Separated? Bless you, no. He never would have left Rendle! And besides, he was very fond of his wife.”

“And she?”

“Oh, she saw he was the kind of man who was fated to make himself ridiculous, and she never interfered with his natural tendencies.”

From Mrs. Memorall, Danyers further learned that Mrs. Anerton, whose husband had died some years before her poet, now divided her life between Rome, where she had a small apartment, and England, where she occasionally went to stay with those of her friends who had been Rendle’s. She had been engaged, for some time after his death, in editing some juvenilia which he had bequeathed to her care; but that task being accomplished, she had been left without definite occupation, and Mrs. Memorall, on the occasion of their last meeting, had found her listless and out of spirits.

“She misses him too much—her life is too empty. I told her so—I told her she ought to marry.”

“Oh!”

“Why not, pray? She’s a young woman still—what many people would call young,” Mrs. Memorall interjected, with a parenthetic glance at the mirror. “Why not accept the inevitable and begin over again? All the King’s horses and all the King’s men won’t bring Rendle to life—and besides, she didn’t marry *him* when she had the chance.”

Danyers winced slightly at this rude fingering of his idol. Was it possible that Mrs. Memorall did not see what an anticlimax such a marriage would have been? Fancy Rendle “making an honest woman” of Silvia; for so society would have viewed it! How such a reparation would have vulgarized their past—it would have been like

“restoring” a masterpiece; and how exquisite must have been the perceptions of the woman who, in defiance of appearances, and perhaps of her own secret inclination, chose to go down to posterity as Silvia rather than as Mrs. Vincent Rendle!

Mrs. Memorall, from this day forth, acquired an interest in Danyers’s eyes. She was like a volume of unindexed and discursive memoirs, through which he patiently plodded in the hope of finding embedded amid layers of dusty twaddle some precious allusion to the subject of his thought. When, some months later, he brought out his first slim volume, in which the remodelled college essay on Rendle figured among a dozen somewhat overstudied “appreciations,” he offered a copy to Mrs. Memorall; who surprised him, the next time they met, with the announcement that she had sent the book to Mrs. Anerton.

Mrs. Anerton in due time wrote to thank her friend. Danyers was privileged to read the few lines in which, in terms that suggested the habit of “acknowledging” similar tributes, she spoke of the author’s “feeling and insight,” and was “so glad of the opportunity,” etc. He went away disappointed, without clearly knowing what else he had expected.

The following spring, when he went abroad, Mrs. Memorall offered him letters to everybody, from the Archbishop of Canterbury to Louise Michel. She did not include Mrs. Anerton, however, and Danyers knew, from a previous conversation, that Silvia objected to people who “brought letters.” He knew also that she travelled during the summer, and was unlikely to return to Rome before the term of his holiday should be reached, and the hope of meeting her was not included among his anticipations.

The lady whose entrance broke upon his solitary repast in the restaurant of the Hotel Villa d’Este had seated herself in such a way that her profile was detached against the window; and thus viewed, her domed forehead, small arched nose, and fastidious lip suggested a silhouette of Marie Antoinette. In the lady’s dress and movements

—in the very turn of her wrist as she poured out her coffee—Danyers thought he detected the same fastidiousness, the same air of tacitly excluding the obvious and unexceptional. Here was a woman who had been much bored and keenly interested. The waiter brought her a *Secolo*, and as she bent above it Danyers noticed that the hair rolled back from her forehead was turning gray; but her figure was straight and slender, and she had the invaluable gift of a girlish back.

The rush of Anglo-Saxon travel had not set toward the lakes, and with the exception of an Italian family or two, and a hump-backed youth with an *abbé*, Danyers and the lady had the marble halls of the Villa d'Este to themselves.

When he returned from his morning ramble among the hills he saw her sitting at one of the little tables at the edge of the lake. She was writing, and a heap of books and newspapers lay on the table at her side. That evening they met again in the garden. He had strolled out to smoke a last cigarette before dinner, and under the black vaulting of ilexes, near the steps leading down to the boat-landing, he found her leaning on the parapet above the lake. At the sound of his approach she turned and looked at him. She had thrown a black lace scarf over her head, and in this sombre setting her face seemed thin and unhappy. He remembered afterwards that her eyes, as they met his, expressed not so much sorrow as profound discontent.

To his surprise she stepped toward him with a detaining gesture.

“Mr. Lewis Danyers, I believe?”

He bowed.

“I am Mrs. Anerton. I saw your name on the visitors’ list and wished to thank you for an essay on Mr. Rendle’s poetry—or rather to tell you how much I appreciated it. The book was sent to me last winter by Mrs. Memorall.”

She spoke in even melancholy tones, as though the habit of perfunctory utterance had robbed her voice of more spontaneous accents; but her smile was charming.

They sat down on a stone bench under the ilexes, and she told him

how much pleasure his essay had given her. She thought it the best in the book—she was sure he had put more of himself into it than into any other; was she not right in conjecturing that he had been very deeply influenced by Mr. Rendle's poetry? *Pour comprendre il faut aimer*, and it seemed to her that, in some ways, he had penetrated the poet's inner meaning more completely than any other critic. There were certain problems, of course, that he had left untouched; certain aspects of that many-sided mind that he had perhaps failed to seize—

"But then you are young," she concluded gently, "and one could not wish you, as yet, the experience that a fuller understanding would imply."

II

She stayed a month at Villa d'Este, and Danyers was with her daily. She showed an unaffected pleasure in his society; a pleasure so obviously founded on their common veneration of Rendle, that the young man could enjoy it without fear of fatuity. At first he was merely one more grain of frankincense on the altar of her insatiable divinity; but gradually a more personal note crept into their intercourse. If she still liked him only because he appreciated Rendle, she at least perceptibly distinguished him from the herd of Rendle's appreciators.

Her attitude toward the great man's memory struck Danyers as perfect. She neither proclaimed nor disavowed her identity. She was frankly Silvia to those who knew and cared; but there was no trace of the Egeria in her pose. She spoke often of Rendle's books, but seldom of himself; there was no posthumous conjugality, no use of the possessive tense, in her abounding reminiscences. Of the master's intellectual life, of his habits of thought and work, she never wearied of talking. She knew the history of each poem; by what scene or episode each image had been evoked; how many times the words in a certain line had been transposed; how long a certain adjective had

been sought, and what had at last suggested it; she could even explain that one impenetrable line, the torment of critics, the joy of detractors, the last line of *The Old Odysseus*.

Danyers felt that in talking of these things she was no mere echo of Rendle's thought. If her identity had appeared to be merged in his it was because they thought alike, not because he had thought for her. Posterity is apt to regard the women whom poets have sung as chance pegs on which they hung their garlands; but Mrs. Anerton's mind was like some fertile garden wherein, inevitably, Rendle's imagination had rooted itself and flowered. Danyers began to see how many threads of his complex mental tissue the poet had owed to the blending of her temperament with his; in a certain sense Silvia had herself created the *Sonnets to Silvia*.

To be the custodian of Rendle's inner self, the door, as it were, to the sanctuary, had at first seemed to Danyers so comprehensive a privilege that he had the sense, as his friendship with Mrs. Anerton advanced, of forcing his way into a life already crowded. What room was there, among such towering memories, for so small an actuality as his? Quite suddenly, after this, he discovered that Mrs. Memorall knew better: his fortunate friend was bored as well as lonely.

"You have had more than any other woman!" he had exclaimed to her one day; and her smile flashed a derisive light on his blunder. Fool that he was, not to have seen that she had not had enough! That she was young still—do years count?—tender, human, a woman; that the living have need of the living.

After that, when they climbed the alleys of the hanging park, resting in one of the little ruined temples, or watching, through a ripple of foliage, the remote blue flash of the lake, they did not always talk of Rendle or of literature. She encouraged Danyers to speak of himself; to confide his ambitions to her; she asked him the questions which are the wise woman's substitute for advice.

"You must write," she said, administering the most exquisite flattery that human lips could give.

Of course he meant to write—why not to do something great in his turn? His best, at least; with the resolve, at the outset, that his best should be *the* best. Nothing less seemed possible with that mandate in his ears. How she had divined him; lifted and disentangled his groping ambitions; laid the awakening touch on his spirit with her creative *Let there be light!*

It was his last day with her, and he was feeling very hopeless and happy.

“You ought to write a book about *him*,” she went on gently. Danyers started; he was beginning to dislike Rendle’s way of walking in unannounced.

“You ought to do it,” she insisted. “A complete interpretation—a summing-up of his style, his purpose, his theory of life and art. No one else could do it as well.”

He sat looking at her perplexedly. Suddenly—dared he guess?

“I couldn’t do it without you,” he faltered.

“I could help you—I would help you, of course.” They sat silent, both looking at the lake.

It was agreed, when they parted, that he should rejoin her six weeks later in Venice. There they were to talk about the book.

III

Lago d’Iseo, August 14th.

When I said good-by to you yesterday I promised to come back to Venice in a week: I was to give you your answer then. I was not honest in saying that; I didn’t mean to go back to Venice or to see you again. I was running away from you—and I mean to keep on running! If *you* won’t, *I* must. Somebody must save you from marrying a disappointed woman of—well, you say years don’t count, and why should they, after all, since you are not to marry me?

That is what I dare not go back to say. *You are not to marry me.* We have had our month together in Venice (such a good month, was it not?) and now you are to go home and write a book—any book but

the one we—didn't talk of!—and I am to stay here, attitudinizing among my memories like a sort of female Tithonus. The dreariness of this enforced immortality!

But you shall know the truth. I care for you, or at least for your love, enough to owe you that.

You thought it was because Vincent Rendle had loved me that there was so little hope for you. I had had what I wanted to the full; wasn't that what you said? It is just when a man begins to think he understands a woman that he may be sure he doesn't! It is because Vincent Rendle *didn't love me* that there is no hope for you. I never had what I wanted, and never, never, never will I stoop to wanting anything else.

Do you begin to understand? It was all a sham then, you say? No, it was all real as far as it went. You are young—you haven't learned, as you will later, the thousand imperceptible signs by which one gropes one's way through the labyrinth of human nature; but didn't it strike you, sometimes, that I never told you any foolish little anecdotes about him? His trick, for instance, of twirling a paper-knife round and round between his thumb and forefinger while he talked; his mania for saving the backs of notes; his greediness for wild strawberries, the little pungent Alpine ones; his childish delight in acrobats and jugglers; his way of always calling me *you—dear you*, every letter began—I never told you a word of all that, did I? Do you suppose I could have helped telling you, if he had loved me? These little things would have been mine, then, a part of my life—of our life—they would have slipped out in spite of me (it's only your unhappy woman who is always reticent and dignified). But there never was any "our life;" it was always "our lives" to the end. . . .

If you knew what a relief it is to tell some one at last, you would bear with me, you would let me hurt you! I shall never be quite so lonely again, now that some one knows.

Let me begin at the beginning. When I first met Vincent Rendle I was not twenty-five. That was twenty years ago. From that time until

his death, five years ago, we were fast friends. He gave me fifteen years, perhaps the best fifteen years, of his life. The world, as you know, thinks that his greatest poems were written during those years; I am supposed to have “inspired” them, and in a sense I did. From the first, the intellectual sympathy between us was almost complete; my mind must have been to him (I fancy) like some perfectly tuned instrument on which he was never tired of playing. Some one told me of his once saying of me that I “always understood;” it is the only praise I ever heard of his giving me. I don’t even know if he thought me pretty, though I hardly think my appearance could have been disagreeable to him, for he hated to be with ugly people. At all events he fell into the way of spending more and more of his time with me. He liked our house; our ways suited him. He was nervous, irritable; people bored him and yet he disliked solitude. He took sanctuary with us. When we travelled he went with us; in the winter he took rooms near us in Rome. In England or on the continent he was always with us for a good part of the year. In small ways I was able to help him in his work; he grew dependent on me. When we were apart he wrote to me continually—he liked to have me share in all he was doing or thinking; he was impatient for my criticism of every new book that interested him; I was a part of his intellectual life. The pity of it was that I wanted to be something more. I was a young woman and I was in love with him—not because he was Vincent Rendle, but just because he was himself!

People began to talk, of course—I was Vincent Rendle’s Mrs. Anerton; when the *Sonnets to Silvia* appeared, it was whispered that I was Silvia. Wherever he went, I was invited; people made up to me in the hope of getting to know him; when I was in London my door-bell never stopped ringing. Elderly peeresses, aspiring hostesses, love-sick girls and struggling authors overwhelmed me with their assiduities. I hugged my success, for I knew what it meant—they thought that Rendle was in love with me! Do you know, at times, they almost made me think so too? Oh, there was no phase of folly I

didn't go through. You can't imagine the excuses a woman will invent for a man's not telling her that he loves her—pitiable arguments that she would see through at a glance if any other woman used them! But all the while, deep down, I knew he had never cared. I should have known it if he had made love to me every day of his life. I could never guess whether he knew what people said about us—he listened so little to what people said; and cared still less, when he heard. He was always quite honest and straightforward with me; he treated me as one man treats another; and yet at times I felt he *must* see that with me it was different. If he did see, he made no sign. Perhaps he never noticed—I am sure he never meant to be cruel. He had never made love to me; it was no fault of his if I wanted more than he could give me. The *Sonnets to Silvia*, you say? But what are they? A cosmic philosophy, not a love-poem; addressed to Woman, not to a woman!

But then, the letters? Ah, the letters! Well, I'll make a clean breast of it. You have noticed the breaks in the letters here and there, just as they seem to be on the point of growing a little—warmer? The critics, you may remember, praised the editor for his commendable delicacy and good taste (so rare in these days!) in omitting from the correspondence all personal allusions, all those *détails intimes* which should be kept sacred from the public gaze. They referred, of course, to the asterisks in the letters to Mrs. A. Those letters I myself prepared for publication; that is to say, I copied them out for the editor, and every now and then I put in a line of asterisks to make it appear that something had been left out. You understand? The asterisks were a sham—*there was nothing to leave out*.

No one but a woman could understand what I went through during those years—the moments of revolt, when I felt I must break away from it all, fling the truth in his face and never see him again; the inevitable reaction, when not to see him seemed the one unendurable thing, and I trembled lest a look or word of mine should disturb the poise of our friendship; the silly days when I hugged the

delusion that he *must* love me, since everybody thought he did; the long periods of numbness, when I didn't seem to care whether he loved me or not. Between these wretched days came others when our intellectual accord was so perfect that I forgot everything else in the joy of feeling myself lifted up on the wings of his thought. Sometimes, then, the heavens seemed to be opened. . . .

All this time he was so dear a friend! He had the genius of friendship, and he spent it all on me. Yes, you were right when you said that I have had more than any other woman. *Il faut de l'adresse pour aimer*, Pascal says; and I was so quiet, so cheerful, so frankly affectionate with him, that in all those years I am almost sure I never bored him. Could I have hoped as much if he had loved me?

You mustn't think of him, though, as having been tied to my skirts. He came and went as he pleased, and so did his fancies. There was a girl once (I am telling you everything), a lovely being who called his poetry "deep" and gave him *Lucile* on his birthday. He followed her to Switzerland one summer, and all the time that he was dangling after her (a little too conspicuously, I always thought, for a Great Man), he was writing to *me* about his theory of vowel-combinations—or was it his experiments in English hexameter? The letters were dated from the very places where I knew they went and sat by waterfalls together and he thought out adjectives for her hair. He talked to me about it quite frankly afterwards. She was perfectly beautiful and it had been a pure delight to watch her; but she *would* talk, and her mind, he said, was "all elbows." And yet, the next year, when her marriage was announced, he went away alone, quite suddenly . . . and it was just afterwards that he published *Love's Viaticum*. Men are queer!

After my husband died—I am putting things crudely, you see—I had a return of hope. It was because he loved me, I argued, that he had never spoken; because he had always hoped some day to make me his wife; because he wanted to spare me the "reproach." Rubbish!

I knew well enough, in my heart of hearts, that my one chance lay in the force of habit. He had grown used to me; he was no longer young; he dreaded new people and new ways; *il avait pris son pli*. Would it not be easier to marry me?

I don't believe he ever thought of it. He wrote me what people call "a beautiful letter;" he was kind, considerate, decently commiserating; then, after a few weeks, he slipped into his old way of coming in every afternoon, and our interminable talks began again just where they had left off. I heard later that people thought I had shown "such good taste" in not marrying him.

So we jogged on for five years longer. Perhaps they were the best years, for I had given up hoping. Then he died.

After his death—this is curious—there came to me a kind of mirage of love. All the books and articles written about him, all the reviews of the "Life," were full of discreet allusions to Silvia. I became again the Mrs. Anerton of the glorious days. Sentimental girls and dear lads like you turned pink when somebody whispered, "that was Silvia you were talking to." Idiots begged for my autograph—publishers urged me to write my reminiscences of him—critics consulted me about the reading of doubtful lines. And I knew that, to all these people, I was the woman Vincent Rendle had loved.

After a while that fire went out too and I was left alone with my past. Alone—quite alone; for he had never really been with me. The intellectual union counted for nothing now. It had been soul to soul, but never hand in hand, and there were no little things to remember him by.

Then there set in a kind of Arctic winter. I crawled into myself as into a snow-hut. I hated my solitude and yet dreaded any one who disturbed it. That phase, of course, passed like the others. I took up life again, and began to read the papers and consider the cut of my gowns. But there was one question that I could not be rid of, that haunted me night and day. Why had he never loved me? Why had I been so much to him, and no more? Was I so ugly, so essentially

unlovable, that though a man might cherish me as his mind's comrade, he could not care for me as a woman? I can't tell you how that question tortured me. It became an obsession.

My poor friend, do you begin to see? I had to find out what some other man thought of me. Don't be too hard on me! Listen first—consider. When I first met Vincent Rendle I was a young woman, who had married early and led the quietest kind of life; I had had no “experiences.” From the hour of our first meeting to the day of his death I never looked at any other man, and never noticed whether any other man looked at me. When he died, five years ago, I knew the extent of my powers no more than a baby. Was it too late to find out? Should I never know *why*?

Forgive me—forgive me. You are so young; it will be an episode, a mere “document,” to you so soon! And, besides, it wasn't as deliberate, as cold-blooded as these disjointed lines have made it appear. I didn't plan it, like a woman in a book. Life is so much more complex than any rendering of it can be. I liked you from the first—I was drawn to you (you must have seen that)—I wanted you to like me; it was not a mere psychological experiment. And yet in a sense it was that, too—I must be honest. I had to have an answer to that question; it was a ghost that had to be laid.

At first I was afraid—oh, so much afraid—that you cared for me only because I was Silvia, that you loved me because you thought Rendle had loved me. I began to think there was no escaping my destiny.

How happy I was when I discovered that you were growing jealous of my past; that you actually hated Rendle! My heart beat like a girl's when you told me you meant to follow me to Venice.

After our parting at Villa d'Este my old doubts reasserted themselves. What did I know of your feeling for me, after all? Were you capable of analyzing it yourself? Was it not likely to be two-thirds vanity and curiosity, and one-third literary sentimentality? You might easily fancy that you cared for Mary Anerton when you

were really in love with Silvia—the heart is such a hypocrite! Or you might be more calculating than I had supposed. Perhaps it was you who had been flattering *my* vanity in the hope (the pardonable hope!) of turning me, after a decent interval, into a pretty little essay with a margin.

When you arrived in Venice and we met again—do you remember the music on the lagoon, that evening, from my balcony?—I was so afraid you would begin to talk about the book—the book, you remember, was your ostensible reason for coming. You never spoke of it, and I soon saw your one fear was *I* might do so—might remind you of your object in being with me. Then I knew you cared for me! yes, at that moment really cared! We never mentioned the book once, did we, during that month in Venice?

I have read my letter over; and now I wish that I had said this to you instead of writing it. I could have felt my way then, watching your face and seeing if you understood. But, no, I could not go back to Venice; and I could not tell you (though I tried) while we were there together. I couldn't spoil that month—my one month. It was so good, for once in my life, to get away from literature. . . .

You will be angry with me at first—but, alas! not for long. What I have done would have been cruel if I had been a younger woman; as it is, the experiment will hurt no one but myself. And it will hurt me horribly (as much as, in your first anger, you may perhaps wish), because it has shown me, for the first time, all that I have missed. . . .

A Journey

As she lay in her berth, staring at the shadows overhead, the rush of the wheels was in her brain, driving her deeper and deeper into circles of wakeful lucidity. The sleeping-car had sunk into its night-silence. Through the wet window-pane she watched the sudden lights, the long stretches of hurrying blackness. Now and then she turned her head and looked through the opening in the hangings at her husband's curtains across the aisle . . .

She wondered restlessly if he wanted anything and if she could hear him if he called. His voice had grown very weak within the last months and it irritated him when she did not hear. This irritability, this increasing childish petulance seemed to give expression to their imperceptible estrangement. Like two faces looking at one another through a sheet of glass they were close together, almost touching, but they could not hear or feel each other: the conductivity between them was broken. She, at least, had this sense of separation, and she fancied sometimes that she saw it reflected in the look with which he supplemented his failing words. Doubtless the fault was hers. She was too impenetrably healthy to be touched by the irrelevancies of disease. Her self-reproachful tenderness was tinged with the sense of his irrationality: she had a vague feeling that there was a purpose in his helpless tyrannies. The suddenness of the change had found her so unprepared. A year ago their pulses had beat to one robust measure; both had the same prodigal confidence in an exhaustless future. Now their energies no longer kept step: hers still bounded ahead of life, preempting unclaimed regions of hope and activity,

while his lagged behind, vainly struggling to overtake her.

When they married, she had such arrears of living to make up: her days had been as bare as the white-washed schoolroom where she forced innutritious facts upon reluctant children. His coming had broken in on the slumber of circumstance, widening the present till it became the encloser of remotest chances. But imperceptibly the horizon narrowed. Life had a grudge against her: she was never to be allowed to spread her wings.

At first the doctors had said that six weeks of mild air would set him right; but when he came back this assurance was explained as having of course included a winter in a dry climate. They gave up their pretty house, storing the wedding presents and new furniture, and went to Colorado. She had hated it there from the first. Nobody knew her or cared about her; there was no one to wonder at the good match she had made, or to envy her the new dresses and the visiting-cards which were still a surprise to her. And he kept growing worse. She felt herself beset with difficulties too evasive to be fought by so direct a temperament. She still loved him, of course; but he was gradually, undefinably ceasing to be himself. The man she had married had been strong, active, gently masterful: the male whose pleasure it is to clear a way through the material obstructions of life; but now it was she who was the protector, he who must be shielded from importunities and given his drops or his beef-juice though the skies were falling. The routine of the sick-room bewildered her; this punctual administering of medicine seemed as idle as some uncomprehended religious mummery.

There were moments, indeed, when warm gushes of pity swept away her instinctive resentment of his condition, when she still found his old self in his eyes as they groped for each other through the dense medium of his weakness. But these moments had grown rare. Sometimes he frightened her: his sunken expressionless face seemed that of a stranger; his voice was weak and hoarse; his thin-lipped smile a mere muscular contraction. Her hand avoided his

damp soft skin, which had lost the familiar roughness of health: she caught herself furtively watching him as she might have watched a strange animal. It frightened her to feel that this was the man she loved; there were hours when to tell him what she suffered seemed the one escape from her fears. But in general she judged herself more leniently, reflecting that she had perhaps been too long alone with him, and that she would feel differently when they were at home again, surrounded by her robust and buoyant family. How she had rejoiced when the doctors at last gave their consent to his going home! She knew, of course, what the decision meant; they both knew. It meant that he was to die; but they dressed the truth in hopeful euphuisms, and at times, in the joy of preparation, she really forgot the purpose of their journey, and slipped into an eager allusion to next year's plans.

At last the day of leaving came. She had a dreadful fear that they would never get away; that somehow at the last moment he would fail her; that the doctors held one of their accustomed treacheries in reserve; but nothing happened. They drove to the station, he was installed in a seat with a rug over his knees and a cushion at his back, and she hung out of the window waving unregretful farewells to the acquaintances she had really never liked till then.

The first twenty-four hours had passed off well. He revived a little and it amused him to look out of the window and to observe the humours of the car. The second day he began to grow weary and to chafe under the dispassionate stare of the freckled child with the lump of chewing-gum. She had to explain to the child's mother that her husband was too ill to be disturbed: a statement received by that lady with a resentment visibly supported by the maternal sentiment of the whole car

That night he slept badly and the next morning his temperature frightened her: she was sure he was growing worse. The day passed slowly, punctuated by the small irritations of travel. Watching his tired face, she traced in its contractions every rattle and jolt of the

train, till her own body vibrated with sympathetic fatigue. She felt the others observing him too, and hovered restlessly between him and the line of interrogative eyes. The freckled child hung about him like a fly; offers of candy and picture-books failed to dislodge her: she twisted one leg around the other and watched him imperturbably. The porter, as he passed, lingered with vague proffers of help, probably inspired by philanthropic passengers swelling with the sense that "something ought to be done;" and one nervous man in a skull-cap was audibly concerned as to the possible effect on his wife's health.

The hours dragged on in a dreary inoccupation. Towards dusk she sat down beside him and he laid his hand on hers. The touch startled her. He seemed to be calling her from far off. She looked at him helplessly and his smile went through her like a physical pang.

"Are you very tired?" she asked.

"No, not very."

"We'll be there soon now."

"Yes, very soon."

"This time to-morrow—"

He nodded and they sat silent. When she had put him to bed and crawled into her own berth she tried to cheer herself with the thought that in less than twenty-four hours they would be in New York. Her people would all be at the station to meet her—she pictured their round unanxious faces pressing through the crowd. She only hoped they would not tell him too loudly that he was looking splendidly and would be all right in no time: the subtler sympathies developed by long contact with suffering were making her aware of a certain coarseness of texture in the family sensibilities.

Suddenly she thought she heard him call. She parted the curtains and listened. No, it was only a man snoring at the other end of the car. His snores had a greasy sound, as though they passed through tallow. She lay down and tried to sleep . . . Had she not heard him

move? She started up trembling . . . The silence frightened her more than any sound. He might not be able to make her hear—he might be calling her now . . . What made her think of such things? It was merely the familiar tendency of an over-tired mind to fasten itself on the most intolerable chance within the range of its forebodings . . . Putting her head out, she listened; but she could not distinguish his breathing from that of the other pairs of lungs about her. She longed to get up and look at him, but she knew the impulse was a mere vent for her restlessness, and the fear of disturbing him restrained her. . . . The regular movement of his curtain reassured her, she knew not why; she remembered that he had wished her a cheerful good-night; and the sheer inability to endure her fears a moment longer made her put them from her with an effort of her whole sound tired body. She turned on her side and slept.

She sat up stiffly, staring out at the dawn. The train was rushing through a region of bare hillocks huddled against a lifeless sky. It looked like the first day of creation. The air of the car was close, and she pushed up her window to let in the keen wind. Then she looked at her watch: it was seven o'clock, and soon the people about her would be stirring. She slipped into her clothes, smoothed her dishevelled hair and crept to the dressing-room. When she had washed her face and adjusted her dress she felt more hopeful. It was always a struggle for her not to be cheerful in the morning. Her cheeks burned deliciously under the coarse towel and the wet hair about her temples broke into strong upward tendrils. Every inch of her was full of life and elasticity. And in ten hours they would be at home!

She stepped to her husband's berth: it was time for him to take his early glass of milk. The window-shade was down, and in the dusk of the curtained enclosure she could just see that he lay sideways, with his face away from her. She leaned over him and drew up the shade. As she did so she touched one of his hands. It felt cold . . .

She bent closer, laying her hand on his arm and calling him by

name. He did not move. She spoke again more loudly; she grasped his shoulder and gently shook it. He lay motionless. She caught hold of his hand again: it slipped from her limply, like a dead thing. A dead thing? . . . Her breath caught. She must see his face. She leaned forward, and hurriedly, shrinkingly, with a sickening reluctance of the flesh, laid her hands on his shoulders and turned him over. His head fell back; his face looked small and smooth; he gazed at her with steady eyes.

She remained motionless for a long time, holding him thus; and they looked at each other. Suddenly she shrank back: the longing to scream, to call out, to fly from him, had almost overpowered her. But a strong hand arrested her. Good God! If it were known that he was dead they would be put off the train at the next station—

In a terrifying flash of remembrance there arose before her a scene she had once witnessed in travelling, when a husband and wife, whose child had died in the train, had been thrust out at some chance station. She saw them standing on the platform with the child's body between them; she had never forgotten the dazed look with which they followed the receding train. And this was what would happen to her. Within the next hour she might find herself on the platform of some strange station, alone with her husband's body. . . . Anything but that! It was too horrible— She quivered like a creature at bay.

As she cowered there, she felt the train moving more slowly. It was coming then—they were approaching a station! She saw again the husband and wife standing on the lonely platform; and with a violent gesture she drew down the shade to hide her husband's face.

Feeling dizzy, she sank down on the edge of the berth, keeping away from his outstretched body, and pulling the curtains close, so that he and she were shut into a kind of sepulchral twilight. She tried to think. At all costs she must conceal the fact that he was dead. But how? Her mind refused to act: she could not plan, combine. She could think of no way but to sit there, clutching the curtains, all day

long . . .

She heard the porter making up her bed; people were beginning to move about the car; the dressing-room door was being opened and shut. She tried to rouse herself. At length with a supreme effort she rose to her feet, stepping into the aisle of the car and drawing the curtains tight behind her. She noticed that they still parted slightly with the motion of the car, and finding a pin in her dress she fastened them together. Now she was safe. She looked round and saw the porter. She fancied he was watching her.

“Ain’t he awake yet?” he enquired.

“No,” she faltered.

“I got his milk all ready when he wants it. You know you told me to have it for him by seven.”

She nodded silently and crept into her seat.

At half-past eight the train reached Buffalo. By this time the other passengers were dressed and the berths had been folded back for the day. The porter, moving to and fro under his burden of sheets and pillows, glanced at her as he passed. At length he said: “Ain’t he going to get up? You know we’re ordered to make up the berths as early as we can.”

She turned cold with fear. They were just entering the station.

“Oh, not yet,” she stammered. “Not till he’s had his milk. Won’t you get it, please?”

“All right. Soon as we start again.”

When the train moved on he reappeared with the milk. She took it from him and sat vaguely looking at it: her brain moved slowly from one idea to another, as though they were stepping-stones set far apart across a whirling flood. At length she became aware that the porter still hovered expectantly.

“Will I give it to him?” he suggested.

“Oh, no,” she cried, rising. “He—he’s asleep yet, I think—”

She waited till the porter had passed on; then she unpinning the curtains and slipped behind them. In the semi-obscurity her

husband's face stared up at her like a marble mask with agate eyes. The eyes were dreadful. She put out her hand and drew down the lids. Then she remembered the glass of milk in her other hand: what was she to do with it? She thought of raising the window and throwing it out; but to do so she would have to lean across his body and bring her face close to his. She decided to drink the milk.

She returned to her seat with the empty glass and after a while the porter came back to get it.

"When'll I fold up his bed?" he asked.

"Oh, not now—not yet; he's ill—he's very ill. Can't you let him stay as he is? The doctor wants him to lie down as much as possible."

He scratched his head. "Well, if he's *really* sick—"

He took the empty glass and walked away, explaining to the passengers that the party behind the curtains was too sick to get up just yet.

She found herself the centre of sympathetic eyes. A motherly woman with an intimate smile sat down beside her.

"I'm real sorry to hear your husband's sick. I've had a remarkable amount of sickness in my family and maybe I could assist you. Can I take a look at him?"

"Oh, no—no, please! He mustn't be disturbed."

The lady accepted the rebuff indulgently.

"Well, it's just as you say, of course, but you don't look to me as if you'd had much experience in sickness and I'd have been glad to assist you. What do you generally do when your husband's taken this way?"

"I—I let him sleep."

"Too much sleep ain't any too healthful either. Don't you give him any medicine?"

"Y—yes."

"Don't you wake him to take it?"

"Yes."

"When does he take the next dose?"

“Not for—two hours—”

The lady looked disappointed. “Well, if I was you I’d try giving it oftener. That’s what I do with my folks.”

After that many faces seemed to press upon her. The passengers were on their way to the dining-car, and she was conscious that as they passed down the aisle they glanced curiously at the closed curtains. One lantern-jawed man with prominent eyes stood still and tried to shoot his projecting glance through the division between the folds. The freckled child, returning from breakfast, waylaid the passers with a buttery clutch, saying in a loud whisper, “He’s sick;” and once the conductor came by, asking for tickets. She shrank into her corner and looked out of the window at the flying trees and houses, meaningless hieroglyphs of an endlessly unrolled papyrus.

Now and then the train stopped, and the newcomers on entering the car stared in turn at the closed curtains. More and more people seemed to pass—their faces began to blend fantastically with the images surging in her brain . . .

Later in the day a fat man detached himself from the mist of faces. He had a creased stomach and soft pale lips. As he pressed himself into the seat facing her she noticed that he was dressed in black broadcloth, with a soiled white tie.

“Husband’s pretty bad this morning, is he?”

“Yes.”

“Dear, dear! Now that’s terribly distressing, ain’t it?” An apostolic smile revealed his gold-filled teeth. “Of course you know there’s no sech thing as sickness. Ain’t that a lovely thought? Death itself is but a deloosion of our grosser senses. On’y lay yourself open to the influx of the sperrit, submit yourself passively to the action of the divine force, and disease and dissolution will cease to exist for you. If you could indooce your husband to read this little pamphlet—”

The faces about her again grew indistinct. She had a vague recollection of hearing the motherly lady and the parent of the freckled child ardently disputing the relative advantages of trying

several medicines at once, or of taking each in turn; the motherly lady maintaining that the competitive system saved time; the other objecting that you couldn't tell which remedy had effected the cure; their voices went on and on, like bell-buoys droning through a fog . . . The porter came up now and then with questions that she did not understand, but that somehow she must have answered since he went away again without repeating them; every two hours the motherly lady reminded her that her husband ought to have his drops; people left the car and others replaced them . . .

Her head was spinning and she tried to steady herself by clutching at her thoughts as they swept by, but they slipped away from her like bushes on the side of a sheer precipice down which she seemed to be falling. Suddenly her mind grew clear again and she found herself vividly picturing what would happen when the train reached New York. She shuddered as it occurred to her that he would be quite cold and that some one might perceive he had been dead since morning.

She thought hurriedly:—"If they see I am not surprised they will suspect something. They will ask questions, and if I tell them the truth they won't believe me—no one would believe me! It will be terrible"—and she kept repeating to herself:—"I must pretend I don't know. I must pretend I don't know. When they open the curtains I must go up to him quite naturally—and then I must scream." . . . She had an idea that the scream would be very hard to do.

Gradually new thoughts crowded upon her, vivid and urgent: she tried to separate and restrain them, but they beset her clamorously, like her school-children at the end of a hot day, when she was too tired to silence them. Her head grew confused, and she felt a sick fear of forgetting her part, of betraying herself by some unguarded word or look.

"I must pretend I don't know," she went on murmuring. The words had lost their significance, but she repeated them mechanically, as though they had been a magic formula, until suddenly she heard herself saying: "I can't remember, I can't remember!"

Her voice sounded very loud, and she looked about her in terror; but no one seemed to notice that she had spoken.

As she glanced down the car her eye caught the curtains of her husband's berth, and she began to examine the monotonous arabesques woven through their heavy folds. The pattern was intricate and difficult to trace; she gazed fixedly at the curtains and as she did so the thick stuff grew transparent and through it she saw her husband's face—his dead face. She struggled to avert her look, but her eyes refused to move and her head seemed to be held in a vice. At last, with an effort that left her weak and shaking, she turned away; but it was of no use; close in front of her, small and smooth, was her husband's face. It seemed to be suspended in the air between her and the false braids of the woman who sat in front of her. With an uncontrollable gesture she stretched out her hand to push the face away, and suddenly she felt the touch of his smooth skin. She repressed a cry and half started from her seat. The woman with the false braids looked around, and feeling that she must justify her movement in some way she rose and lifted her travelling-bag from the opposite seat. She unlocked the bag and looked into it; but the first object her hand met was a small flask of her husband's, thrust there at the last moment, in the haste of departure. She locked the bag and closed her eyes . . . his face was there again, hanging between her eyeballs and lids like a waxen mask against a red curtain . . .

She roused herself with a shiver. Had she fainted or slept? Hours seemed to have elapsed; but it was still broad day, and the people about her were sitting in the same attitudes as before.

A sudden sense of hunger made her aware that she had eaten nothing since morning. The thought of food filled her with disgust, but she dreaded a return of faintness, and remembering that she had some biscuits in her bag she took one out and ate it. The dry crumbs choked her, and she hastily swallowed a little brandy from her husband's flask. The burning sensation in her throat acted as a

counter-irritant, momentarily relieving the dull ache of her nerves. Then she felt a gently-stealing warmth, as though a soft air fanned her, and the swarming fears relaxed their clutch, receding through the stillness that enclosed her, a stillness soothing as the spacious quietude of a summer day. She slept.

Through her sleep she felt the impetuous rush of the train. It seemed to be life itself that was sweeping her on with headlong inexorable force—sweeping her into darkness and terror, and the awe of unknown days.—Now all at once everything was still—not a sound, not a pulsation . . . She was dead in her turn, and lay beside him with smooth upstaring face. How quiet it was!—and yet she heard feet coming, the feet of the men who were to carry them away . . . She could feel too—she felt a sudden prolonged vibration, a series of hard shocks, and then another plunge into darkness: the darkness of death this time—a black whirlwind on which they were both spinning like leaves, in wild uncoiling spirals, with millions and millions of the dead . . .

She sprang up in terror. Her sleep must have lasted a long time, for the winter day had paled and the lights had been lit. The car was in confusion, and as she regained her self-possession she saw that the passengers were gathering up their wraps and bags. The woman with the false braids had brought from the dressing-room a sickly ivy-plant in a bottle, and the Christian Scientist was reversing his cuffs. The porter passed down the aisle with his impartial brush. An impersonal figure with a gold-banded cap asked for her husband's ticket. A voice shouted "*Baig-gage express!*" and she heard the clicking of metal as the passengers handed over their checks.

Presently her window was blocked by an expanse of sooty wall, and the train passed into the Harlem tunnel. The journey was over; in a few minutes she would see her family pushing their joyous way through the throng at the station. Her heart dilated. The worst terror was past . . .

“We’d better get him up now, hadn’t we?” asked the porter, touching her arm.

He had her husband’s hat in his hand and was meditatively revolving it under his brush.

She looked at the hat and tried to speak; but suddenly the car grew dark. She flung up her arms, struggling to catch at something, and fell face downward, striking her head against the dead man’s berth.

The Pelican

SHE was very pretty when I first knew her, with the sweet straight nose and short upper lip of the cameo-brooch divinity, humanized by a dimple that flowered in her cheek whenever anything was said possessing the outward attributes of humor without its intrinsic quality. For the dear lady was providentially deficient in humor: the least hint of the real thing clouded her lovely eye like the hovering shadow of an algebraic problem.

I don't think nature had meant her to be "intellectual;" but what can a poor thing do, whose husband has died of drink when her baby is hardly six months old, and who finds her coral necklace and her grandfather's edition of the British Dramatists inadequate to the demands of the creditors?

Her mother, the celebrated Irene Astarte Pratt, had written a poem in blank verse on "The Fall of Man;" one of her aunts was dean of a girls' college; another had translated Euripides—with such a family, the poor child's fate was sealed in advance. The only way of paying her husband's debts and keeping the baby clothed was to be intellectual; and, after some hesitation as to the form her mental activity was to take, it was unanimously decided that she was to give lectures.

They began by being drawing-room lectures. The first time I saw her she was standing by the piano, against a flippant background of Dresden china and photographs, telling a roomful of women preoccupied with their spring bonnets all she thought she knew about Greek art. The ladies assembled to hear her had given me to

understand that she was “doing it for the baby,” and this fact, together with the shortness of her upper lip and the bewildering cooperation of her dimple, disposed me to listen leniently to her dissertation. Happily, at that time Greek art was still, if I may use the phrase, easily handled: it was as simple as walking down a museum-gallery lined with pleasant familiar Venuses and Apollos. All the later complications—the archaic and archaistic conundrums; the influences of Assyria and Asia Minor; the conflicting attributions and the wrangles of the erudite—still slumbered in the bosom of the future “scientific critic.” Greek art in those days began with Phidias and ended with the Apollo Belvedere; and a child could travel from one to the other without danger of losing his way.

Mrs. Amyot had two fatal gifts: a capacious but inaccurate memory, and an extraordinary fluency of speech. There was nothing she did not remember—wrongly; but her halting facts were swathed in so many layers of rhetoric that their infirmities were imperceptible to her friendly critics. Besides, she had been taught Greek by the aunt who had translated Euripides; and the mere sound of the αἰς and οἰς that she now and then not unskilfully let slip (correcting herself, of course, with a start, and indulgently mistranslating the phrase), struck awe to the hearts of ladies whose only “accomplishment” was French—if you didn’t speak too quickly.

I had then but a momentary glimpse of Mrs. Amyot, but a few months later I came upon her again in the New England university town where the celebrated Irene Astarte Pratt lived on the summit of a local Parnassus, with lesser muses and college professors respectfully grouped on the lower ledges of the sacred declivity. Mrs. Amyot, who, after her husband’s death, had returned to the maternal roof (even during her father’s lifetime the roof had been distinctively maternal), Mrs. Amyot, thanks to her upper lip, her dimple and her Greek, was already esconced in a snug hollow of the Parnassian slope.

After the lecture was over it happened that I walked home with

Mrs. Amyot. From the incensed glances of two or three learned gentlemen who were hovering on the door-step when we emerged, I inferred that Mrs. Amyot, at that period, did not often walk home alone; but I doubt whether any of my discomfited rivals, whatever his claims to favor, was ever treated to so ravishing a mixture of shyness and self-abandonment, of sham erudition and real teeth and hair, as it was my privilege to enjoy. Even at the opening of her public career Mrs. Amyot had a tender eye for strangers, as possible links with successive centres of culture to which in due course the torch of Greek art might be handed on.

She began by telling me that she had never been so frightened in her life. She knew, of course, how dreadfully learned I was, and when, just as she was going to begin, her hostess had whispered to her that I was in the room, she had felt ready to sink through the floor. Then (with a flying dimple) she had remembered Emerson's line—wasn't it Emerson's?—that beauty is its own excuse for *seeing*, and that had made her feel a little more confident, since she was sure that no one saw beauty more vividly than she—as a child she used to sit for hours gazing at an Etruscan vase on the book-case in the library, while her sisters played with their dolls—and if *seeing* beauty was the only excuse one needed for talking about it, why, she was sure I would make allowances and not be *too* critical and sarcastic, especially if, as she thought probable, I had heard of her having lost her poor husband, and how she had to do it for the baby.

Being abundantly assured of my sympathy on these points, she went on to say that she had always wanted so much to consult me about her lectures. Of course, one subject wasn't enough (this view of the limitations of Greek art as a "subject" gave me a startling idea of the rate at which a successful lecturer might exhaust the universe); she must find others; she had not ventured on any as yet, but she had thought of Tennyson—didn't I *love* Tennyson? She *worshipped* him so that she was sure she could help others to understand him; or what did I think of a "course" on Raphael or Michelangelo—or on the

heroines of Shakespeare? There were some fine steel-engravings of Raphael's Madonnas and of the Sistine ceiling in her mother's library, and she had seen Miss Cushman in several Shakespearian rôles, so that on these subjects also she felt qualified to speak with authority.

When we reached her mother's door she begged me to come in and talk the matter over; she wanted me to see the baby—she felt as though I should understand her better if I saw the baby—and the dimple flashed through a tear.

The fear of encountering the author of "The Fall of Man," combined with the opportune recollection of a dinner engagement, made me evade this appeal with the promise of returning on the morrow. On the morrow, I left too early to redeem my promise; and for several years afterwards I saw no more of Mrs. Amyot.

My calling at that time took me at irregular intervals from one to another of our larger cities, and as Mrs. Amyot was also peripatetic it was inevitable that sooner or later we should cross each other's path. It was therefore without surprise that, one snowy afternoon in Boston, I learned from the lady with whom I chanced to be lunching that, as soon as the meal was over, I was to be taken to hear Mrs. Amyot lecture.

"On Greek art?" I suggested.

"Oh, you've heard her then? No, this is one of the series called 'Homes and Haunts of the Poets.' Last week we had Wordsworth and the Lake Poets, to-day we are to have Goethe and Weimar. She is a wonderful creature—all the women of her family are geniuses. You know, of course, that her mother was Irene Astarte Pratt, who wrote a poem on 'The Fall of Man'; N. P. Willis called her the female Milton of America. One of Mrs. Amyot's aunts has translated Eurip—"

"And is she as pretty as ever?" I irrelevantly interposed.

My hostess looked shocked. "She is excessively modest and retiring. She says it is actual suffering for her to speak in public. You know she only does it for the baby."

Punctually at the hour appointed, we took our seats in a lecture-

hall full of strenuous females in ulsters. Mrs. Amyot was evidently a favorite with these austere sisters, for every corner was crowded, and as we entered a pale usher with an educated mispronunciation was setting forth to several dejected applicants the impossibility of supplying them with seats.

Our own were happily so near the front that when the curtains at the back of the platform parted, and Mrs. Amyot appeared, I was at once able to establish a comparison between the lady placidly dimpling to the applause of her public and the shrinking drawing-room orator of my earlier recollections.

Mrs. Amyot was as pretty as ever, and there was the same curious discrepancy between the freshness of her aspect and the staleness of her theme, but something was gone of the blushing unsteadiness with which she had fired her first random shots at Greek art. It was not that the shots were less uncertain, but that she now had an air of assuming that, for her purpose, the bull's-eye was everywhere, so that there was no need to be flustered in taking aim. This assurance had so facilitated the flow of her eloquence that she seemed to be performing a trick analogous to that of the conjuror who pulls hundreds of yards of white paper out of his mouth. From a large assortment of stock adjectives she chose, with unerring deftness and rapidity, the one that taste and discrimination would most surely have rejected, fitting out her subject with a whole wardrobe of slop-shop epithets irrelevant in cut and size. To the invaluable knack of not disturbing the association of ideas in her audience, she added the gift of what may be called a confidential manner—so that her fluent generalizations about Goethe and his place in literature (the lecture was, of course, manufactured out of Lewes's book) had the flavor of personal experience, of views sympathetically exchanged with her audience on the best way of knitting children's socks, or of putting up preserves for the winter. It was, I am sure, to this personal accent—the moral equivalent of her dimple—that Mrs. Amyot owed her prodigious, her irrational success. It was her art of transposing

second-hand ideas into first-hand emotions that so endeared her to her feminine listeners.

To any one not in search of “documents” Mrs. Amyot’s success was hardly of a kind to make her more interesting, and my curiosity flagged with the growing conviction that the “suffering” entailed on her by public speaking was at most a retrospective pang. I was sure that she had reached the point of measuring and enjoying her effects, of deliberately manipulating her public; and there must indeed have been a certain exhilaration in attaining results so considerable by means involving so little conscious effort. Mrs. Amyot’s art was simply an extension of coquetry: she flirted with her audience.

In this mood of enlightened skepticism I responded but languidly to my hostess’s suggestion that I should go with her that evening to see Mrs. Amyot. The aunt who had translated Euripides was at home on Saturday evenings, and one met “thoughtful” people there, my hostess explained: it was one of the intellectual centres of Boston. My mood remained distinctly resentful of any connection between Mrs. Amyot and intellectuality, and I declined to go; but the next day I met Mrs. Amyot in the street.

She stopped me reproachfully. She had heard I was in Boston; why had I not come last night? She had been told that I was at her lecture, and it had frightened her—yes, really, almost as much as years ago in Hillbridge. She never *could* get over that stupid shyness, and the whole business was as distasteful to her as ever; but what could she do? There was the baby—he was a big boy now, and boys were so expensive! But did I really think she had improved the least little bit? And why wouldn’t I come home with her now, and see the boy, and tell her frankly what I had thought of the lecture? She had plenty of flattery—people were so kind, and every one knew that she did it for the baby—but what she felt the need of was criticism, severe, discriminating criticism like mine—oh, she knew that I was dreadfully discriminating!

I went home with her and saw the boy. In the early heat of her

Tennyson-worship Mrs. Amyot had christened him Lancelot, and he looked it. Perhaps, however, it was his black velvet dress and the exasperating length of his yellow curls, together with the fact of his having been taught to recite Browning to visitors, that raised to fever-heat the itching of my palms in his Infant-Samuel-like presence. I have since had reason to think that he would have preferred to be called Billy, and to hunt cats with the other boys in the block: his curls and his poetry were simply another outlet for Mrs. Amyot's irrepressible coquetry.

But if Lancelot was not genuine, his mother's love for him was. It justified everything—the lectures *were* for the baby, after all. I had not been ten minutes in the room before I was pledged to help Mrs. Amyot carry out her triumphant fraud. If she wanted to lecture on Plato she should—Plato must take his chance like the rest of us! There was no use, of course, in being “discriminating.” I preserved sufficient reason to avoid that pitfall, but I suggested “subjects” and made lists of books for her with a fatuity that became more obvious as time attenuated the remembrance of her smile; I even remember thinking that some men might have cut the knot by marrying her, but I handed over Plato as a hostage and escaped by the afternoon train.

The next time I saw her was in New York, when she had become so fashionable that it was a part of the whole duty of woman to be seen at her lectures. The lady who suggested that of course I ought to go and hear Mrs. Amyot, was not very clear about anything except that she was perfectly lovely, and had had a horrid husband, and was doing it to support her boy. The subject of the discourse (I think it was on Ruskin) was clearly of minor importance, not only to my friend, but to the throng of well-dressed and absent-minded ladies who rustled in late, dropped their muffs and pocketbooks, and undisguisedly lost themselves in the study of each other's apparel. They received Mrs. Amyot with warmth, but she evidently represented a social obligation like going to church, rather than any

more personal interest; in fact, I suspect that every one of the ladies would have remained away, had they been sure that none of the others were coming.

Whether Mrs. Amyot was disheartened by the lack of sympathy between herself and her hearers, or whether the sport of arousing it had become a task, she certainly imparted her platitudes with less convincing warmth than of old. Her voice had the same confidential inflections, but it was like a voice reproduced by a gramophone: the real woman seemed far away. She had grown stouter without losing her dewy freshness, and her smart gown might have been taken to show either the potentialities of a settled income, or a politic concession to the taste of her hearers. As I listened I reproached myself for ever having suspected her of self-deception in saying that she took no pleasure in her work. I was sure now that she did it only for Lancelot, and judging from the size of her audience and the price of the tickets I concluded that Lancelot must be receiving a liberal education.

I was living in New York that winter, and in the rotation of dinners I found myself one evening at Mrs. Amyot's side. The dimple came out at my greeting as punctually as a cuckoo in a Swiss clock, and I detected the same automatic quality in the tone in which she made her usual pretty demand for advice. She was like a musical-box charged with popular airs. They succeeded one another with breathless rapidity, but there was a moment after each when the cylinders scraped and whizzed.

Mrs. Amyot, as I found when I called on her, was living in a sunny flat, with a sitting-room full of flowers and a tea-table that had the air of expecting visitors. She owned that she had been ridiculously successful. It was delightful, of course, on Lancelot's account. Lancelot had been sent to the best school in the country, and if things went well and people didn't tire of his silly mother he was to go to Harvard afterwards. During the next two or three years Mrs. Amyot kept her flat in New York, and radiated art and literature

upon the suburbs. I saw her now and then, always stouter, better dressed, more successful and more automatic: she had become a lecturing-machine.

I went abroad for a year or two and when I came back she had disappeared. I asked several people about her, but life had closed over her. She had been last heard of as lecturing—still lecturing—but no one seemed to know when or where.

It was in Boston that I found her at last, forlornly swaying to the oscillations of an overhead strap in a crowded trolley-car. Her face had so changed that I lost myself in a startled reckoning of the time that had elapsed since our parting. She spoke to me shyly, as though aware of my hurried calculation, and conscious that in five years she ought not to have altered so much as to upset my notion of time. Then she seemed to set it down to her dress, for she nervously gathered her cloak over a gown that asked only to be concealed, and shrank into a seat behind the line of prehensile bipeds blocking the aisle of the car.

It was perhaps because she so obviously avoided me that I felt for the first time that I might be of use to her; and when she left the car I made no excuse for following her.

She said nothing of needing advice and did not ask me to walk home with her, concealing, as we talked, her transparent preoccupations under the guise of a sudden interest in all I had been doing since she had last seen me. Of what concerned her, I learned only that Lancelot was well and that for the present she was not lecturing—she was tired and her doctor had ordered her to rest. On the doorstep of a shabby house she paused and held out her hand. She had been so glad to see me and perhaps if I were in Boston again—the tired dimple, as it were, bowed me out and closed the door on the conclusion of the phrase.

Two or three weeks later, at my club in New York, I found a letter from her. In it she owned that she was troubled, that of late she had been unsuccessful, and that, if I chanced to be coming back to

Boston, and could spare her a little of that invaluable advice which —. A few days later the advice was at her disposal.

She told me frankly what had happened. Her public had grown tired of her. She had seen it coming on for some time, and was shrewd enough in detecting the causes. She had more rivals than formerly —younger women, she admitted, with a smile that could still afford to be generous—and then her audiences had grown more critical and consequently more exacting. Lecturing—as she understood it—used to be simple enough. You chose your topic—Raphael, Shakespeare, Gothic Architecture, or some such big familiar “subject”—and read up about it for a week or so at the Athenæum or the Astor Library, and then told your audience what you had read. Now, it appeared, that simple process was no longer adequate. People had tired of familiar “subjects”; it was the fashion to be interested in things that one hadn’t always known about—natural selection, animal magnetism, sociology and comparative folk-lore; while, in literature, the demand had become equally difficult to meet, since Matthew Arnold had introduced the habit of studying the “influence” of one author on another. She had tried lecturing on influences, and had done very well as long as the public was satisfied with the tracing of such obvious influences as that of Turner on Ruskin, of Schiller on Goethe, of Shakespeare on English literature; but such investigations had soon lost all charm for her too-sophisticated audiences, who now demanded either that the influence or the influenced should be quite unknown, or that there should be no perceptible connection between the two. The zest of the performance lay in the measure of ingenuity with which the lecturer established a relation between two people who had probably never heard of each other, much less read each other’s works. A pretty Miss Williams with red hair had, for instance, been lecturing with great success on the influence of the Rosicrucians upon the poetry of Keats, while somebody else had given a “course” on the influence of St. Thomas Aquinas upon Professor Huxley.

Mrs. Amyot, warmed by my participation in her distress, went on to say that the growing demand for evolution was what most troubled her. Her grandfather had been a pillar of the Presbyterian ministry, and the idea of her lecturing on Darwin or Herbert Spencer was deeply shocking to her mother and aunts. In one sense the family had staked its literary as well as its spiritual hopes on the literal inspiration of Genesis: what became of “The Fall of Man” in the light of modern exegesis?

The upshot of it was that she had ceased to lecture because she could no longer sell tickets enough to pay for the hire of a lecture-hall; and as for the managers, they wouldn’t look at her. She had tried her luck all through the Eastern States and as far south as Washington; but it was of no use, and unless she could get hold of some new subjects—or, better still, of some new audiences—she must simply go out of the business. That would mean the failure of all she had worked for, since Lancelot would have to leave Harvard. She paused, and wept some of the unbecoming tears that spring from real grief. Lancelot, it appeared, was to be a genius. He had passed his opening examinations brilliantly; he had “literary gifts”; he had written beautiful poetry, much of which his mother had copied out, in reverentially slanting characters, in a velvet-bound volume which she drew from a locked drawer.

Lancelot’s verse struck me as nothing more alarming than growing-pains; but it was not to learn this that she had summoned me. What she wanted was to be assured that he was worth working for, an assurance which I managed to convey by the simple stratagem of remarking that the poems reminded me of Swinburne—and so they did, as well as of Browning, Tennyson, Rossetti, and all the other poets who supply young authors with original inspirations.

This point being established, it remained to be decided by what means his mother was, in the French phrase, to pay herself the luxury of a poet. It was clear that this indulgence could be bought only with counterfeit coin, and that the one way of helping Mrs.

Amyot was to become a party to the circulation of such currency. My fetish of intellectual integrity went down like a ninepin before the appeal of a woman no longer young and distinctly foolish, but full of those dear contradictions and irrelevancies that will always make flesh and blood prevail against a syllogism. When I took leave of Mrs. Amyot I had promised her a dozen letters to Western universities and had half pledged myself to sketch out a lecture on the reconciliation of science and religion.

In the West she achieved a success which for a year or more embittered my perusal of the morning papers. The fascination that lures the murderer back to the scene of his crime drew my eye to every paragraph celebrating Mrs. Amyot's last brilliant lecture on the influence of something upon somebody; and her own letters—she overwhelmed me with them—spared me no detail of the entertainment given in her honor by the Palimpsest Club of Omaha or of her reception at the University of Leadville. The college professors were especially kind: she assured me that she had never before met with such discriminating sympathy. I winced at the adjective, which cast a sudden light on the vast machinery of fraud that I had set in motion. All over my native land, men of hitherto unblemished integrity were conniving with me in urging their friends to go and hear Mrs. Amyot lecture on the reconciliation of science and religion! My only hope was that, somewhere among the number of my accomplices, Mrs. Amyot might find one who would marry her in the defense of his convictions.

None, apparently, resorted to such heroic measures; for about two years later I was startled by the announcement that Mrs. Amyot was lecturing in Trenton, New Jersey, on modern theosophy in the light of the Vedas. The following week she was at Newark, discussing Schopenhauer in the light of recent psychology. The week after that I was on the deck of an ocean steamer, reconsidering my share in Mrs. Amyot's triumphs with the impartiality with which one views an episode that is being left behind at the rate of twenty knots an hour.

After all, I had been helping a mother to educate her son.

The next ten years of my life were spent in Europe, and when I came home the recollection of Mrs. Amyot had become as inoffensive as one of those pathetic ghosts who are said to strive in vain to make themselves visible to the living. I did not even notice the fact that I no longer heard her spoken of; she had dropped like a dead leaf from the bough of memory.

A year or two after my return I was condemned to one of the worst punishments a worker can undergo—an enforced holiday. The doctors who pronounced the inhuman sentence decreed that it should be worked out in the South, and for a whole winter I carried my cough, my thermometer and my idleness from one fashionable orange-grove to another. In the vast and melancholy sea of my disoccupation I clutched like a drowning man at any human driftwood within reach. I took a critical and depreciatory interest in the coughs, the thermometers and the idleness of my fellow-sufferers; but to the healthy, the occupied, the transient I clung with indiscriminating enthusiasm.

In no other way can I explain, as I look back on it, the importance I attached to the leisurely confidences of a new arrival with a brown beard who, tilted back at my side on a hotel veranda hung with roses, imparted to me one afternoon the simple annals of his past. There was nothing in the tale to kindle the most inflammable imagination, and though the man had a pleasant frank face and a voice differing agreeably from the shrill inflections of our fellow-lodgers, it is probable that under different conditions his discursive history of successful business ventures in a Western city would have affected me somewhat in the manner of a lullaby.

Even at the time I was not sure I liked his agreeable voice: it had a self-importance out of keeping with the humdrum nature of his story, as though a breeze engaged in shaking out a table-cloth should have fancied itself inflating a banner. But this criticism may have been a mere mark of my own fastidiousness, for the man seemed a simple

fellow, satisfied with his middling fortunes, and already (he was not much past thirty) deep-sunk in conjugal content.

He had just started on an anecdote connected with the cutting of his eldest boy's teeth, when a lady I knew, returning from her late drive, paused before us for a moment in the twilight, with the smile which is the feminine equivalent of beads to savages.

"Won't you take a ticket?" she said sweetly.

Of course I would take a ticket—but for what? I ventured to inquire.

"Oh, that's so good of you—for the lecture this evening. You needn't go, you know; we're none of us going; most of us have been through it already at Aiken and at Saint Augustine and at Palm Beach. I've given away my tickets to some new people who've just come from the North, and some of us are going to send our maids, just to fill up the room."

"And may I ask to whom you are going to pay this delicate attention?"

"Oh, I thought you knew—to poor Mrs. Amyot. She's been lecturing all over the South this winter; she's simply *haunted* me ever since I left New York—and we had six weeks of her at Bar Harbor last summer! One has to take tickets, you know, because she's a widow and does it for her son—to pay for his education. She's so plucky and nice about it, and talks about him in such a touching unaffected way, that everybody is sorry for her, and we all simply ruin ourselves in tickets. I do hope that boy's nearly educated!"

"Mrs. Amyot? Mrs. Amyot?" I repeated. "Is she *still* educating her son?"

"Oh, do you know about her? Has she been at it long? There's some comfort in that, for I suppose when the boy's provided for the poor thing will be able to take a rest—and give us one!"

She laughed and held out her hand.

"Here's your ticket. Did you say *tickets*—two? Oh, thanks. Of course you needn't go."

“But I mean to go. Mrs. Amyot is an old friend of mine.”

“Do you really? That’s awfully good of you. Perhaps I’ll go too if I can persuade Charlie and the others to come. And I wonder”—in a well-directed aside—“if your friend—?”

I telegraphed her under cover of the dusk that my friend was of too recent standing to be drawn into her charitable toils, and she masked her mistake under a rattle of friendly adjurations not to be late, and to be sure to keep a seat for her, as she had quite made up her mind to go even if Charlie and the others wouldn’t.

The flutter of her skirts subsided in the distance, and my neighbor, who had half turned away to light a cigar, made no effort to reopen the conversation. At length, fearing he might have overheard the allusion to himself, I ventured to ask if he were going to the lecture that evening.

“Much obliged—I have a ticket,” he said abruptly.

This struck me as in such bad taste that I made no answer; and it was he who spoke next.

“Did I understand you to say that you were an old friend of Mrs. Amyot’s?”

“I think I may claim to be, if it is the same Mrs. Amyot I had the pleasure of knowing many years ago. My Mrs. Amyot used to lecture too—”

“To pay for her son’s education?”

“I believe so.”

“Well—see you later.”

He got up and walked into the house.

In the hotel drawing-room that evening there was but a meagre sprinkling of guests, among whom I saw my brown-bearded friend sitting alone on a sofa, with his head against the wall. It could not have been curiosity to see Mrs. Amyot that had impelled him to attend the performance, for it would have been impossible for him, without changing his place, to command the improvised platform at the end of the room. When I looked at him he seemed lost in

contemplation of the chandelier.

The lady from whom I had bought my tickets fluttered in late, unattended by Charlie and the others, and assuring me that she would *scream* if we had the lecture on Ibsen—she had heard it three times already that winter. A glance at the programme reassured her: it informed us (in the lecturer's own slanting hand) that Mrs. Amyot was to lecture on the *Cosmogony*.

After a long pause, during which the small audience coughed and moved its chairs and showed signs of regretting that it had come, the door opened, and Mrs. Amyot stepped upon the platform. Ah, poor lady!

Some one said "Hush!", the coughing and chair-shifting subsided, and she began.

It was like looking at one's self early in the morning in a cracked mirror. I had no idea I had grown so old. As for Lancelot, he must have a beard. A beard? The word struck me, and without knowing why I glanced across the room at my bearded friend on the sofa. Oddly enough he was looking at me, with a half-defiant, half-sullen expression; and as our glances crossed, and his fell, the conviction came to me that *he was Lancelot*.

I don't remember a word of the lecture; and yet there were enough of them to have filled a good-sized dictionary. The stream of Mrs. Amyot's eloquence had become a flood: one had the despairing sense that she had sprung a leak, and that until the plumber came there was nothing to be done about it.

The plumber came at length, in the shape of a clock striking ten; my companion, with a sigh of relief, drifted away in search of Charlie and the others; the audience scattered with the precipitation of people who had discharged a duty; and, without surprise, I found the brown-bearded stranger at my elbow.

We stood alone in the bare-floored room, under the flaring chandelier.

"I think you told me this afternoon that you were an old friend of

Mrs. Amyot's?" he began awkwardly.

I assented.

"Will you come in and see her?"

"Now? I shall be very glad to, if—"

"She's ready; she's expecting you," he interposed.

He offered no further explanation, and I followed him in silence. He led me down the long corridor, and pushed open the door of a sitting-room.

"Mother," he said, closing the door after we had entered, "here's the gentleman who says he used to know you."

Mrs. Amyot, who sat in an easy-chair stirring a cup of bouillon, looked up with a start. She had evidently not seen me in the audience, and her son's description had failed to convey my identity. I saw a frightened look in her eyes; then, like a frost flower on a window-pane, the dimple expanded on her wrinkled cheek, and she held out her hand.

"I'm so glad," she said, "so glad!"

She turned to her son, who stood watching us. "You must have told Lancelot all about me—you've known me so long!"

"I haven't had time to talk to your son—since I knew he was your son," I explained.

Her brow cleared. "Then you haven't had time to say anything very dreadful?" she said with a laugh.

"It is he who has been saying dreadful things," I returned, trying to fall in with her tone.

I saw my mistake. "What things?" she faltered.

"Making me feel how old I am by telling me about his children."

"My grandchildren!" she exclaimed with a blush.

"Well, if you choose to put it so."

She laughed again, vaguely, and was silent. I hesitated a moment and then put out my hand.

"I see you are tired. I shouldn't have ventured to come in at this hour if your son—"

The son stepped between us. "Yes, I asked him to come," he said to his mother, in his clear self-assertive voice. "I haven't told him anything yet; but you've got to—now. That's what I brought him for."

His mother straightened herself, but I saw her eye waver. "Lancelot—" she began.

"Mr. Amyot," I said, turning to the young man, "if your mother will let me come back to-morrow, I shall be very glad—"

He struck his hand hard against the table on which he was leaning.

"No, sir! It won't take long, but it's got to be said now."

He moved nearer to his mother, and I saw his lip twitch under his beard. After all, he was younger and less sure of himself than I had fancied.

"See here, mother," he went on, "there's something here that's got to be cleared up, and as you say this gentleman is an old friend of yours it had better be cleared up in his presence. Maybe he can help explain it—and if he can't, it's got to be explained to *him*."

Mrs. Amyot's lips moved, but she made no sound. She glanced at me helplessly and sat down. My early inclination to thrash Lancelot was beginning to reassert itself. I took up my hat and moved toward the door.

"Mrs. Amyot is under no obligation to explain anything whatever to me," I said curtly.

"Well! She's under an obligation to me, then—to explain something in your presence." He turned to her again. "Do you know what the people in this hotel are saying? Do you know what he thinks—what they all think? That you're doing this lecturing to support me—to pay for my education! They say you go round telling them so. That's what they buy the tickets for—they do it out of charity. Ask him if it isn't what they say—ask him if they weren't joking about it on the piazza before dinner. The others think I'm a little boy, but he's known you for years, and he must have known how old I was. *He* must have known it wasn't to pay for my

education!”

He stood before her with his hands clenched, the veins beating in his temples. She had grown very pale, and her cheeks looked hollow. When she spoke her voice had an odd click in it.

“If—if these ladies and gentlemen have been coming to my lectures out of charity, I see nothing to be ashamed of in that—” she faltered.

“If they’ve been coming out of charity to *me*,” he retorted, “don’t you see you’ve been making me a party to a fraud? Isn’t there any shame in that?” His forehead reddened. “Mother! Can’t you see the shame of letting people think I was a d— beat, who sponged on you for my keep? Let alone making us both the laughing-stock of every place you go to!”

“I never did that, Lancelot!”

“Did what?”

“Made you a laughing-stock—”

He stepped close to her and caught her wrist.

“Will you look me in the face and swear you never told people you were doing this lecturing business to support me?”

There was a long silence. He dropped her wrist and she lifted a limp handkerchief to her frightened eyes. “I did do it—to support you—to educate you”—she sobbed.

“We’re not talking about what you did when I was a boy. Everybody who knows me knows I’ve been a grateful son. Have I ever taken a penny from you since I left college ten years ago?”

“I never said you had! How can you accuse your mother of such wickedness, Lancelot?”

“Have you never told anybody in this hotel—or anywhere else in the last ten years—that you were lecturing to support me? Answer me that!”

“How can you,” she wept, “before a stranger?”

“Haven’t you said such things about *me* to strangers?” he retorted.

“Lancelot!”

"Well—answer me, then. Say you haven't, mother!" His voice broke unexpectedly and he took her hand with a gentler touch. "I'll believe anything you tell me," he said almost humbly.

She mistook his tone and raised her head with a rash clutch at dignity.

"I think you'd better ask this gentleman to excuse you first."

"No, by God, I won't!" he cried. "This gentleman says he knows all about you and I mean him to know all about me too. I don't mean that he or anybody else under this roof shall go on thinking for another twenty-four hours that a cent of their money has ever gone into my pockets since I was old enough to shift for myself. And he sha'n't leave this room till you've made that clear to him."

He stepped back as he spoke and put his shoulders against the door.

"My dear young gentleman," I said politely, "I shall leave this room exactly when I see fit to do so—and that is now. I have already told you that Mrs. Amyot owes me no explanation of her conduct."

"But I owe you an explanation of mine—you and every one who has bought a single one of her lecture tickets. Do you suppose a man who's been through what I went through while that woman was talking to you in the porch before dinner is going to hold his tongue, and not attempt to justify himself? No decent man is going to sit down under that sort of thing. It's enough to ruin his character. If you're my mother's friend, you owe it to me to hear what I've got to say."

He pulled out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead.

"Good God, mother!" he burst out suddenly, "what did you do it for? Haven't you had everything you wanted ever since I was able to pay for it? Haven't I paid you back every cent you spent on me when I was in college? Have I ever gone back on you since I was big enough to work?" He turned to me with a laugh. "I thought she did it to amuse herself—and because there was such a demand for her lectures. *Such a demand!* That's what she always told me. When we

asked her to come out and spend this winter with us in Minneapolis, she wrote back that she couldn't because she had engagements all through the south, and her manager wouldn't let her off. That's the reason why I came all the way on here to see her. We thought she was the most popular lecturer in the United States, my wife and I did! We were awfully proud of it too, I can tell you." He dropped into a chair, still laughing.

"How can you, Lancelot, how can you!" His mother, forgetful of my presence, was clinging to him with tentative caresses. "When you didn't need the money any longer I spent it all on the children—you know I did."

"Yes, on lace christening dresses and life-size rocking-horses with real manes! The kind of thing children can't do without."

"Oh, Lancelot, Lancelot—I loved them so! How can you believe such falsehoods about me?"

"What falsehoods about you?"

"That I ever told anybody such dreadful things?"

He put her back gently, keeping his eyes on hers. "Did you never tell anybody in this house that you were lecturing to support your son?"

Her hands dropped from his shoulders and she flashed round on me in sudden anger.

"I know what I think of people who call themselves friends and who come between a mother and her son!"

"Oh, mother, mother!" he groaned.

I went up to him and laid my hand on his shoulder.

"My dear man," I said, "don't you see the uselessness of prolonging this?"

"Yes, I do," he answered abruptly; and before I could forestall his movement he rose and walked out of the room.

There was a long silence, measured by the lessening reverberations of his footsteps down the wooden floor of the corridor.

When they ceased I approached Mrs. Amyot, who had sunk into

her chair. I held out my hand and she took it without a trace of resentment on her ravaged face.

“I sent his wife a seal-skin jacket at Christmas!” she said, with the tears running down her cheeks.

Souls Belated

THEIR railway-carriage had been full when the train left Bologna; but at the first station beyond Milan their only remaining companion—a courtly person who ate garlic out of a carpet-bag—had left his crumb-strewn seat with a bow.

Lydia's eye regretfully followed the shiny broadcloth of his retreating back till it lost itself in the cloud of touts and cabdrivers hanging about the station; then she glanced across at Gannett and caught the same regret in his look. They were both sorry to be alone.

"*Par-ten-za!*" shouted the guard. The train vibrated to a sudden slamming of doors; a waiter ran along the platform with a tray of fossilized sandwiches; a belated porter flung a bundle of shawls and band-boxes into a third-class carriage; the guard snapped out a brief *Partenza!* which indicated the purely ornamental nature of his first shout; and the train swung out of the station.

The direction of the road had changed, and a shaft of sunlight struck across the dusty red velvet seats into Lydia's corner. Gannett did not notice it. He had returned to his *Revue de Paris*, and she had to rise and lower the shade of the farther window. Against the vast horizon of their leisure such incidents stood out sharply.

Having lowered the shade, Lydia sat down, leaving the length of the carriage between herself and Gannett. At length he missed her and looked up.

"I moved out of the sun," she hastily explained.

He looked at her curiously: the sun was beating on her through the shade.

“Very well,” he said pleasantly; adding, “You don’t mind?” as he drew a cigarette-case from his pocket.

It was a refreshing touch, relieving the tension of her spirit with the suggestion that, after all, if he could *smoke*—! The relief was only momentary. Her experience of smokers was limited (her husband had disapproved of the use of tobacco) but she knew from hearsay that men sometimes smoked to get away from things; that a cigar might be the masculine equivalent of darkened windows and a headache. Gannett, after a puff or two, returned to his review.

It was just as she had foreseen; he feared to speak as much as she did. It was one of the misfortunes of their situation that they were never busy enough to necessitate, or even to justify, the postponement of unpleasant discussions. If they avoided a question it was obviously, unconcealably because the question was disagreeable. They had unlimited leisure and an accumulation of mental energy to devote to any subject that presented itself; new topics were in fact at a premium. Lydia sometimes had premonitions of a famine-stricken period when there would be nothing left to talk about, and she had already caught herself doling out piecemeal what, in the first prodigality of their confidences, she would have flung to him in a breath. Their silence therefore might simply mean that they had nothing to say; but it was another disadvantage of their position that it allowed infinite opportunity for the classification of minute differences. Lydia had learned to distinguish between real and factitious silences; and under Gannett’s she now detected a hum of speech to which her own thoughts made breathless answer.

How could it be otherwise, with that thing between them? She glanced up at the rack overhead. The *thing* was there, in her dressing-bag, symbolically suspended over her head and his. He was thinking of it now, just as she was; they had been thinking of it in unison ever since they had entered the train. While the carriage had held other travellers they had screened her from his thoughts; but now that he and she were alone she knew exactly what was passing through his

mind; she could almost hear him asking himself what he should say to her. . . .

The thing had come that morning, brought up to her in an innocent-looking envelope with the rest of their letters, as they were leaving the hotel at Bologna. As she tore it open, she and Gannett were laughing over some ineptitude of the local guide-book—they had been driven, of late, to make the most of such incidental humors of travel. Even when she had unfolded the document she took it for some unimportant business paper sent abroad for her signature, and her eye travelled inattentively over the curly *Whereases* of the preamble until a word arrested her:—Divorce. There it stood, an impassable barrier, between her husband's name and hers.

She had been prepared for it, of course, as healthy people are said to be prepared for death, in the sense of knowing it must come without in the least expecting that it will. She had known from the first that Tillotson meant to divorce her—but what did it matter? Nothing mattered, in those first days of supreme deliverance, but the fact that she was free; and not so much (she had begun to be aware) that freedom had released her from Tillotson as that it had given her to Gannett. This discovery had not been agreeable to her self-esteem. She had preferred to think that Tillotson had himself embodied all her reasons for leaving him; and those he represented had seemed cogent enough to stand in no need of reinforcement. Yet she had not left him till she met Gannett. It was her love for Gannett that had made life with Tillotson so poor and incomplete a business. If she had never, from the first, regarded her marriage as a full canceling of her claims upon life, she had at least, for a number of years, accepted it as a provisional compensation,—she made it “do.” Existence in the commodious Tillotson mansion in Fifth Avenue—with Mrs. Tillotson senior commanding the approaches from the second-story front windows—had been reduced to a series of purely automatic acts. The moral atmosphere of the Tillotson interior was as carefully screened

and curtained as the house itself: Mrs. Tillotson senior dreaded ideas as much as a draught in her back. Prudent people liked an even temperature; and to do anything unexpected was as foolish as going out in the rain. One of the chief advantages of being rich was that one need not be exposed to unforeseen contingencies: by the use of ordinary firmness and common sense one could make sure of doing exactly the same thing every day at the same hour. These doctrines, reverentially imbibed with his mother's milk, Tillotson (a model son who had never given his parents an hour's anxiety) complacently expounded to his wife, testifying to his sense of their importance by the regularity with which he wore galoshes on damp days, his punctuality at meals, and his elaborate precautions against burglars and contagious diseases. Lydia, coming from a smaller town, and entering New York life through the portals of the Tillotson mansion, had mechanically accepted this point of view as inseparable from having a front pew in church and a parterre box at the opera. All the people who came to the house revolved in the same small circle of prejudices. It was the kind of society in which, after dinner, the ladies compared the exorbitant charges of their children's teachers, and agreed that, even with the new duties on French clothes, it was cheaper in the end to get everything from Worth; while the husbands, over their cigars, lamented municipal corruption, and decided that the men to start a reform were those who had no private interests at stake.

To Lydia this view of life had become a matter of course, just as lumbering about in her mother-in-law's landau had come to seem the only possible means of locomotion, and listening every Sunday to a fashionable Presbyterian divine the inevitable atonement for having thought oneself bored on the other six days of the week. Before she met Gannett her life had seemed merely dull: his coming made it appear like one of those dismal Cruikshank prints in which the people are all ugly and all engaged in occupations that are either vulgar or stupid.

It was natural that Tillotson should be the chief sufferer from this readjustment of focus. Gannett's nearness had made her husband ridiculous, and a part of the ridicule had been reflected on herself. Her tolerance laid her open to a suspicion of obtuseness from which she must, at all costs, clear herself in Gannett's eyes.

She did not understand this until afterwards. At the time she fancied that she had merely reached the limits of endurance. In so large a charter of liberties as the mere act of leaving Tillotson seemed to confer, the small question of divorce or no divorce did not count. It was when she saw that she had left her husband only to be with Gannett that she perceived the significance of anything affecting their relations. Her husband, in casting her off, had virtually flung her at Gannett: it was thus that the world viewed it. The measure of alacrity with which Gannett would receive her would be the subject of curious speculation over afternoon-tea tables and in club corners. She knew what would be said—she had heard it so often of others! The recollection bathed her in misery. The men would probably back Gannett to “do the decent thing”; but the ladies' eye-brows would emphasize the worthlessness of such enforced fidelity; and after all, they would be right. She had put herself in a position where Gannett “owed” her something; where, as a gentleman, he was bound to “stand the damage.” The idea of accepting such compensation had never crossed her mind; the so-called rehabilitation of such a marriage had always seemed to her the only real disgrace. What she dreaded was the necessity of having to explain herself; of having to combat his arguments; of calculating, in spite of herself, the exact measure of insistence with which he pressed them. She knew not whether she most shrank from his insisting too much or too little. In such a case the nicest sense of proportion might be at fault; and how easy to fall into the error of taking her resistance for a test of his sincerity! Whichever way she turned, an ironical implication confronted her: she had the exasperated sense of having walked into the trap of some stupid

practical joke.

Beneath all these preoccupations lurked the dread of what he was thinking. Sooner or later, of course, he would have to speak; but that, in the meantime, he should think, even for a moment, that there was any use in speaking, seemed to her simply unendurable. Her sensitiveness on this point was aggravated by another fear, as yet barely on the level of consciousness; the fear of unwillingly involving Gannett in the trammels of her dependence. To look upon him as the instrument of her liberation; to resist in herself the least tendency to a wifely taking possession of his future; had seemed to Lydia the one way of maintaining the dignity of their relation. Her view had not changed, but she was aware of a growing inability to keep her thoughts fixed on the essential point—the point of parting with Gannett. It was easy to face as long as she kept it sufficiently far off: but what was this act of mental postponement but a gradual encroachment on his future? What was needful was the courage to recognize the moment when, by some word or look, their voluntary fellowship should be transformed into a bondage the more wearing that it was based on none of those common obligations which make the most imperfect marriage in some sort a centre of gravity.

When the porter, at the next station, threw the door open, Lydia drew back, making way for the hoped-for intruder; but none came, and the train took up its leisurely progress through the spring wheat-fields and budding copses. She now began to hope that Gannett would speak before the next station. She watched him furtively, half-disposed to return to the seat opposite his, but there was an artificiality about his absorption that restrained her. She had never before seen him read with so conspicuous an air of warding off interruption. What could he be thinking of? Why should he be afraid to speak? Or was it her answer that he dreaded?

The train paused for the passing of an express, and he put down his book and leaned out of the window. Presently he turned to her with a smile.

"There's a jolly old villa out here," he said.

His easy tone relieved her, and she smiled back at him as she crossed over to his corner.

Beyond the embankment, through the opening in a mossy wall, she caught sight of the villa, with its broken balustrades, its stagnant fountains, and the stone satyr closing the perspective of a dusky grass-walk.

"How should you like to live there?" he asked as the train moved on.

"There?"

"In some such place, I mean. One might do worse, don't you think so? There must be at least two centuries of solitude under those yew-trees. Shouldn't you like it?"

"I—I don't know," she faltered. She knew now that he meant to speak.

He lit another cigarette. "We shall have to live somewhere, you know," he said as he bent above the match.

Lydia tried to speak carelessly. "*Je n'en vois pas la nécessité!* Why not live everywhere, as we have been doing?"

"But we can't travel forever, can we?"

"Oh, forever's a long word," she objected, picking up the review he had thrown aside.

"For the rest of our lives then," he said, moving nearer. She made a slight gesture which caused his hand to slip from hers.

"Why should we make plans? I thought you agreed with me that it's pleasanter to drift."

He looked at her hesitatingly. "It's been pleasant, certainly; but I suppose I shall have to get at my work again some day. You know I haven't written a line since—all this time," he hastily emended.

She flamed with sympathy and self-reproach. "Oh, if you mean *that*—if you want to write—of course we must settle down. How stupid of me not to have thought of it sooner! Where shall we go? Where do you think you could work best? We oughtn't to lose any more time."

He hesitated again. "I had thought of a villa in these parts. It's quiet; we shouldn't be bothered. Should you like it?"

"Of course I should like it." She paused and looked away. "But I thought—I remember your telling me once that your best work had been done in a crowd—in big cities. Why should you shut yourself up in a desert?"

Gannett, for a moment, made no reply. At length he said, avoiding her eye as carefully as she avoided his: "It might be different now; I can't tell, of course, till I try. A writer ought not to be dependent on his *milieu*; it's a mistake to humor oneself in that way; and I thought that just at first you might prefer to be—"

She faced him. "To be what?"

"Well—quiet. I mean—"

"What do you mean by 'at first'?" she interrupted.

He paused again. "I mean after we are married."

She thrust up her chin and turned toward the window. "Thank you!" she tossed back at him.

"Lydia!" he exclaimed blankly; and she felt in every fibre of her averted person that he had made the inconceivable, the unpardonable mistake of anticipating her acquiescence.

The train rattled on and he groped for a third cigarette. Lydia remained silent.

"I haven't offended you?" he ventured at length, in the tone of a man who feels his way.

She shook her head with a sigh. "I thought you understood," she moaned. Their eyes met and she moved back to his side.

"Do you want to know how not to offend me? By taking it for granted, once for all, that you've said your say on this odious question and that I've said mine, and that we stand just where we did this morning before that—that hateful paper came to spoil everything between us!"

"To spoil everything between us? What on earth do you mean? Aren't you glad to be free?"

"I was free before."

"Not to marry me," he suggested.

"But I don't *want* to marry you!" she cried.

She saw that he turned pale. "I'm obtuse, I suppose," he said slowly. "I confess I don't see what you're driving at. Are you tired of the whole business? Or was I simply a—an excuse for getting away? Perhaps you didn't care to travel alone? Was that it? And now you want to chuck me?" His voice had grown harsh. "You owe me a straight answer, you know; don't be tender-hearted!"

Her eyes swam as she leaned to him. "Don't you see it's because I care—because I care so much? Oh, Ralph! Can't you see how it would humiliate me? Try to feel it as a woman would! Don't you see the misery of being made your wife in this way? If I'd known you as a girl—that would have been a real marriage! But now—this vulgar fraud upon society—and upon a society we despised and laughed at—this sneaking back into a position that we've voluntarily forfeited: don't you see what a cheap compromise it is? We neither of us believe in the abstract 'sacredness' of marriage; we both know that no ceremony is needed to consecrate our love for each other; what object can we have in marrying, except the secret fear of each that the other may escape, or the secret longing to work our way back gradually—oh, very gradually—into the esteem of the people whose conventional morality we have always ridiculed and hated? And the very fact that, after a decent interval, these same people would come and dine with us—the women who talk about the indissolubility of marriage, and who would let me die in a gutter to-day because I am 'leading a life of sin'—doesn't that disgust you more than their turning their backs on us now? I can stand being cut by them, but I couldn't stand their coming to call and asking what I meant to do about visiting that unfortunate Mrs. So-and-so!"

She paused, and Gannett maintained a perplexed silence.

"You judge things too theoretically," he said at length, slowly. "Life is made up of compromises."

"The life we ran away from—yes! If we had been willing to accept them"—she flushed—"we might have gone on meeting each other at Mrs. Tillotson's dinners."

He smiled slightly. "I didn't know that we ran away to found a new system of ethics. I supposed it was because we loved each other."

"Life is complex, of course; isn't it the very recognition of that fact that separates us from the people who see it *tout d'une pièce*? If *they* are right—if marriage is sacred in itself and the individual must always be sacrificed to the family—then there can be no real marriage between us, since our—our being together is a protest against the sacrifice of the individual to the family." She interrupted herself with a laugh. "You'll say now that I'm giving you a lecture on sociology! Of course one acts as one can—as one must, perhaps—pulled by all sorts of invisible threads; but at least one needn't pretend, for social advantages, to subscribe to a creed that ignores the complexity of human motives—that classifies people by arbitrary signs, and puts it in everybody's reach to be on Mrs. Tillotson's visiting-list. It may be necessary that the world should be ruled by conventions—but if we believed in them, why did we break through them? And if we don't believe in them, is it honest to take advantage of the protection they afford?"

Gannett hesitated. "One may believe in them or not; but as long as they do rule the world it is only by taking advantage of their protection that one can find a *modus vivendi*."

"Do outlaws need a *modus vivendi*?"

He looked at her hopelessly. Nothing is more perplexing to man than the mental process of a woman who reasons her emotions.

She thought she had scored a point and followed it up passionately. "You do understand, don't you? You see how the very thought of the thing humiliates me! We are together today because we choose to be—don't let us look any farther than that!" She caught his hands. "*Promise* me you'll never speak of it again; promise me

you'll never *think* of it even," she implored, with a tearful prodigality of italics.

Through what followed—his protests, his arguments, his final unconvinced submission to her wishes—she had a sense of his but half-discerning all that, for her, had made the moment so tumultuous. They had reached that memorable point in every heart-history when, for the first time, the man seems obtuse and the woman irrational. It was the abundance of his intentions that consoled her, on reflection, for what they lacked in quality. After all, it would have been worse, incalculably worse, to have detected any over-readiness to understand her.

II

When the train at night-fall brought them to their journey's end at the edge of one of the lakes, Lydia was glad that they were not, as usual, to pass from one solitude to another. Their wanderings during the year had indeed been like the flight of outlaws: through Sicily, Dalmatia, Transylvania and Southern Italy they had persisted in their tacit avoidance of their kind. Isolation, at first, had deepened the flavor of their happiness, as night intensifies the scent of certain flowers; but in the new phase on which they were entering, Lydia's chief wish was that they should be less abnormally exposed to the action of each other's thoughts.

She shrank, nevertheless, as the brightly-looming bulk of the fashionable Anglo-American hotel on the water's brink began to radiate toward their advancing boat its vivid suggestion of social order, visitors' lists, Church services, and the bland inquisition of the *table-d'hôte*. The mere fact that in a moment or two she must take her place on the hotel register as Mrs. Gannett seemed to weaken the springs of her resistance.

They had meant to stay for a night only, on their way to a lofty village among the glaciers of Monte Rosa; but after the first plunge into publicity, when they entered the dining-room, Lydia felt the

relief of being lost in a crowd, of ceasing for a moment to be the centre of Gannett's scrutiny; and in his face she caught the reflection of her feeling. After dinner, when she went upstairs, he strolled into the smoking-room, and an hour or two later, sitting in the darkness of her window, she heard his voice below and saw him walking up and down the terrace with a companion cigar at his side. When he came up he told her he had been talking to the hotel chaplain—a very good sort of fellow.

“Queer little microcosms, these hotels! Most of these people live here all summer and then migrate to Italy or the Riviera. The English are the only people who can lead that kind of life with dignity—those soft-voiced old ladies in Shetland shawls somehow carry the British Empire under their caps. *Civis Romanus sum*. It's a curious study—there might be some good things to work up here.”

He stood before her with the vivid preoccupied stare of the novelist on the trail of a “subject.” With a relief that was half painful she noticed that, for the first time since they had been together, he was hardly aware of her presence.

“Do you think you could write here?”

“Here? I don't know.” His stare dropped. “After being out of things so long one's first impressions are bound to be tremendously vivid, you know. I see a dozen threads already that one might follow—”

He broke off with a touch of embarrassment.

“Then follow them. We'll stay,” she said with sudden decision.

“Stay here?” He glanced at her in surprise, and then, walking to the window, looked out upon the dusky slumber of the garden.

“Why not?” she said at length, in a tone of veiled irritation.

“The place is full of old cats in caps who gossip with the chaplain. Shall you like—I mean, it would be different if—”

She flamed up.

“Do you suppose I care? It's none of their business.”

“Of course not; but you won't get them to think so.”

“They may think what they please.”

He looked at her doubtfully.

"It's for you to decide."

"We'll stay," she repeated.

Gannett, before they met, had made himself known as a successful writer of short stories and of a novel which had achieved the distinction of being widely discussed. The reviewers called him "promising," and Lydia now accused herself of having too long interfered with the fulfilment of his promise. There was a special irony in the fact, since his passionate assurances that only the stimulus of her companionship could bring out his latent faculty had almost given the dignity of a "vocation" to her course: there had been moments when she had felt unable to assume, before posterity, the responsibility of thwarting his career. And, after all, he had not written a line since they had been together: his first desire to write had come from renewed contact with the world! Was it all a mistake then? Must the most intelligent choice work more disastrously than the blundering combinations of chance? Or was there a still more humiliating answer to her perplexities? His sudden impulse of activity so exactly coincided with her own wish to withdraw, for a time, from the range of his observation, that she wondered if he too were not seeking sanctuary from intolerable problems.

"You must begin to-morrow!" she cried, hiding a tremor under the laugh with which she added, "I wonder if there's any ink in the inkstand?"

Whatever else they had at the Hotel Bellosguardo, they had, as Miss Pinsent said, "a certain tone." It was to Lady Susan Condit that they owed this inestimable benefit; an advantage ranking in Miss Pinsent's opinion above even the lawn tennis courts and the resident chaplain. It was the fact of Lady Susan's annual visit that made the hotel what it was. Miss Pinsent was certainly the last to underrate such a privilege:—"It's so important, my dear, forming as we do a little family, that there should be some one to give *the tone*; and no

one could do it better than Lady Susan—an earl's daughter and a person of such determination. Dear Mrs. Ainger now—who really *ought*, you know, when Lady Susan's away—absolutely refuses to assert herself." Miss Pinsent sniffed derisively. "A bishop's niece!—my dear, I saw her once actually give in to some South Americans—and before us all. She gave up her seat at table to oblige them—such a lack of dignity! Lady Susan spoke to her very plainly about it afterwards."

Miss Pinsent glanced across the lake and adjusted her auburn front.

"But of course I don't deny that the stand Lady Susan takes is not always easy to live up to—for the rest of us, I mean. Monsieur Grossart, our good proprietor, finds it trying at times, I know—he has said as much, privately, to Mrs. Ainger and me. After all, the poor man is not to blame for wanting to fill his hotel, is he? And Lady Susan is so difficult—so very difficult—about new people. One might almost say that she disapproves of them beforehand, on principle. And yet she's had warnings—she very nearly made a dreadful mistake once with the Duchess of Levens, who dyed her hair and—well, swore and smoked. One would have thought that might have been a lesson to Lady Susan." Miss Pinsent resumed her knitting with a sigh. "There are exceptions, of course. She took at once to you and Mr. Gannett—it was quite remarkable, really. Oh, I don't mean that either—of course not! It was perfectly natural—we *all* thought you so charming and interesting from the first day—we knew at once that Mr. Gannett was intellectual, by the magazines you took in; but you know what I mean. Lady Susan is so very—well, I won't say prejudiced, as Mrs. Ainger does—but so prepared *not* to like new people, that her taking to you in that way was a surprise to us all, I confess."

Miss Pinsent sent a significant glance down the long laurustinus alley from the other end of which two people—a lady and gentleman—were strolling toward them through the smiling neglect of the

garden.

"In this case, of course, it's very different; that I'm willing to admit. Their looks are against them; but, as Mrs. Ainger says, one can't exactly tell them so."

"She's very handsome," Lydia ventured, with her eyes on the lady, who showed, under the dome of a vivid sunshade, the hour-glass figure and superlative coloring of a Christmas chromo.

"That's the worst of it. She's too handsome."

"Well, after all, she can't help that."

"Other people manage to," said Miss Pinsent skeptically. "But isn't it rather unfair of Lady Susan—considering that nothing is known about them?"

"But, my dear, that's the very thing that's against them. It's infinitely worse than any actual knowledge."

Lydia mentally agreed that, in the case of Mrs. Linton, it possibly might be.

"I wonder why they came here?" she mused.

"That's against them too. It's always a bad sign when loud people come to a quiet place. And they've brought van-loads of boxes—her maid told Mrs. Ainger's that they meant to stop indefinitely."

"And Lady Susan actually turned her back on her in the *salon*?"

"My dear, she said it was for our sakes: that makes it so unanswerable! But poor Grossart *is* in a way! The Lintons have taken his most expensive *suite*, you know—the yellow damask drawing-room above the portico—and they have champagne with every meal!"

They were silent as Mr. and Mrs. Linton sauntered by; the lady with tempestuous brows and challenging chin; the gentleman, a blond stripling, trailing after her, head downward, like a reluctant child dragged by his nurse.

"What does your husband think of them, my dear?" Miss Pinsent whispered as they passed out of earshot.

Lydia stooped to pick a violet in the border.

“He hasn’t told me.”

“Of your speaking to them, I mean. Would he approve of that? I know how very particular nice Americans are. I think your action might make a difference; it would certainly carry weight with Lady Susan.”

“Dear Miss Pinsent, you flatter me!”

Lydia rose and gathered up her book and sun-shade.

“Well, if you’re asked for an opinion—if Lady Susan asks you for one—I think you ought to be prepared,” Miss Pinsent admonished her as she moved away.

III

Lady Susan held her own. She ignored the Lintons, and her little family, as Miss Pinsent phrased it, followed suit. Even Mrs. Ainger agreed that it was obligatory. If Lady Susan owed it to the others not to speak to the Lintons, the others clearly owed it to Lady Susan to back her up. It was generally found expedient, at the Hotel Bellosguardo, to adopt this form of reasoning.

Whatever effect this combined action may have had upon the Lintons, it did not at least have that of driving them away. Monsieur Grossart, after a few days of suspense, had the satisfaction of seeing them settle down in his yellow damask *premier* with what looked like a permanent installation of palm-trees and silk sofa-cushions, and a gratifying continuance in the consumption of champagne. Mrs. Linton trailed her Doucet draperies up and down the garden with the same challenging air, while her husband, smoking innumerable cigarettes, dragged himself dejectedly in her wake; but neither of them, after the first encounter with Lady Susan, made any attempt to extend their acquaintance. They simply ignored their ignorers. As Miss Pinsent resentfully observed, they behaved exactly as though the hotel were empty.

It was therefore a matter of surprise, as well as of displeasure, to Lydia, to find, on glancing up one day from her seat in the garden,

that the shadow which had fallen across her book was that of the enigmatic Mrs. Linton.

"I want to speak to you," that lady said, in a rich hard voice that seemed the audible expression of her gown and her complexion.

Lydia started. She certainly did not want to speak to Mrs. Linton.

"Shall I sit down here?" the latter continued, fixing her intensely-shaded eyes on Lydia's face, "or are you afraid of being seen with me?"

"Afraid?" Lydia colored. "Sit down, please. What is it that you wish to say?"

Mrs. Linton, with a smile, drew up a garden-chair and crossed one open-work ankle above the other.

"I want you to tell me what my husband said to your husband last night."

Lydia turned pale.

"My husband—to yours?" she faltered, staring at the other.

"Didn't you know they were closeted together for hours in the smoking-room after you went upstairs? My man didn't get to bed until nearly two o'clock and when he did I couldn't get a word out of him. When he wants to be aggravating I'll back him against anybody living!" Her teeth and eyes flashed persuasively upon Lydia. "But you'll tell me what they were talking about, won't you? I know I can trust you—you look so awfully kind. And it's for his own good. He's such a precious donkey and I'm so afraid he's got into some beastly scrape or other. If he'd only trust his own old woman! But they're always writing to him and setting him against me. And I've got nobody to turn to." She laid her hand on Lydia's with a rattle of bracelets. "You'll help me, won't you?"

Lydia drew back from the smiling ferceness of her brows.

"I'm sorry—but I don't think I understand. My husband has said nothing to me of—of yours."

The great black crescents above Mrs. Linton's eyes met angrily.

"I say—is that true?" she demanded.

Lydia rose from her seat.

“Oh, look here, I didn’t mean that, you know—you mustn’t take one up so! Can’t you see how rattled I am?”

Lydia saw that, in fact, her beautiful mouth was quivering beneath softened eyes.

“I’m beside myself!” the splendid creature wailed, dropping into her seat.

“I’m so sorry,” Lydia repeated, forcing herself to speak kindly; “but how can I help you?”

Mrs. Linton raised her head sharply.

“By finding out—there’s a darling!”

“Finding what out?”

“What Trevenna told him.”

“Trevenna—?” Lydia echoed in bewilderment.

Mrs. Linton clapped her hand to her mouth.

“Oh, Lord—there, it’s out! What a fool I am! But I supposed of course you knew; I supposed everybody knew.” She dried her eyes and bridled. “Didn’t you know that he’s Lord Trevenna? I’m Mrs. Cope.”

Lydia recognized the names. They had figured in a flamboyant elopement which had thrilled fashionable London some six months earlier.

“Now you see how it is—you understand, don’t you?” Mrs. Cope continued on a note of appeal. “I knew you would—that’s the reason I came to you. I suppose *he* felt the same thing about your husband; he’s not spoken to another soul in the place.” Her face grew anxious again. “He’s awfully sensitive, generally—he feels our position, he says—as if it wasn’t *my* place to feel that! But when he does get talking there’s no knowing what he’ll say. I know he’s been brooding over something lately, and I *must* find out what it is—it’s to his interest that I should. I always tell him that I think only of his interest; if he’d only trust me! But he’s been so odd lately—I can’t think what he’s plotting. You will help me, dear?”

Lydia, who had remained standing, looked away uncomfortably.

"If you mean by finding out what Lord Trevenna has told my husband, I'm afraid it's impossible."

"Why impossible?"

"Because I infer that it was told in confidence."

Mrs. Cope stared incredulously.

"Well, what of that? Your husband looks such a dear—any one can see he's awfully gone on you. What's to prevent your getting it out of him?"

Lydia flushed.

"I'm not a spy!" she exclaimed.

"A spy—a spy? How dare you?" Mrs. Cope flamed out. "Oh, I don't mean that either! Don't be angry with me—I'm so miserable." She essayed a softer note. "Do you call that spying—for one woman to help out another? I do need help so dreadfully! I'm at my wits' end with Trevenna, I am indeed. He's such a boy—a mere baby, you know; he's only two-and-twenty." She dropped her orbed lids. "He's younger than me—only fancy! A few months younger. I tell him he ought to listen to me as if I was his mother; oughtn't he now? But he won't, he won't! All his people are at him, you see—oh, I know *their* little game! Trying to get him away from me before I can get my divorce—that's what they're up to. At first he wouldn't listen to them; he used to toss their letters over to me to read; but now he reads them himself, and answers 'em too, I fancy; he's always shut up in his room, writing. If I only knew what his plan is I could stop him fast enough—he's such a simpleton. But he's dreadfully deep too—at times I can't make him out. But I know he's told your husband everything—I knew that last night the minute I laid eyes on him. And I *must* find out—you must help me—I've got no one else to turn to!"

She caught Lydia's fingers in a stormy pressure.

"Say you'll help me—you and your husband."

Lydia tried to free herself.

"What you ask is impossible; you must see that it is. No one could interfere in—in the way you ask."

Mrs. Cope's clutch tightened.

"You won't, then? You won't?"

"Certainly not. Let me go, please."

Mrs. Cope released her with a laugh.

"Oh, go by all means—pray don't let me detain you! Shall you go and tell Lady Susan Condit that there's a pair of us—or shall I save you the trouble of enlightening her?"

Lydia stood still in the middle of the path, seeing her antagonist through a mist of terror. Mrs. Cope was still laughing.

"Oh, I'm not spiteful by nature, my dear; but you're a little more than flesh and blood can stand! It's impossible, is it? Let you go, indeed! You're too good to be mixed up in my affairs, are you? Why, you little fool, the first day I laid eyes on you I saw that you and I were both in the same box—that's the reason I spoke to you."

She stepped nearer, her smile dilating on Lydia like a lamp through a fog.

"You can take your choice, you know; I always play fair. If you'll tell I'll promise not to. Now then, which is it to be?"

Lydia, involuntarily, had begun to move away from the pelting storm of words; but at this she turned and sat down again.

"You may go," she said simply. "I shall stay here."

IV

She stayed there for a long time, in the hypnotized contemplation, not of Mrs. Cope's present, but of her own past. Gannett, early that morning, had gone off on a long walk—he had fallen into the habit of taking these mountain-tramps with various fellow-lodgers; but even had he been within reach she could not have gone to him just then. She had to deal with herself first. She was surprised to find how, in the last months, she had lost the habit of introspection. Since their coming to the Hotel Bellosguardo she and Gannett had tacitly

avoided themselves and each other.

She was aroused by the whistle of the three o'clock steamboat as it neared the landing just beyond the hotel gates. Three o'clock! Then Gannett would soon be back—he had told her to expect him before four. She rose hurriedly, her face averted from the inquisitorial façade of the hotel. She could not see him just yet; she could not go indoors. She slipped through one of the overgrown garden-alleys and climbed a steep path to the hills.

It was dark when she opened their sitting-room door. Gannett was sitting on the window-ledge smoking a cigarette. Cigarettes were now his chief resource: he had not written a line during the two months they had spent at the Hotel Bellosguardo. In that respect, it had turned out not to be the right *milieu* after all.

He started up at Lydia's entrance.

"Where have you been? I was getting anxious."

She sat down in a chair near the door.

"Up the mountain," she said wearily.

"Alone?"

"Yes."

Gannett threw away his cigarette: the sound of her voice made him want to see her face.

"Shall we have a little light?" he suggested.

She made no answer and he lifted the globe from the lamp and put a match to the wick. Then he looked at her. "Anything wrong? You look done up."

She sat glancing vaguely about the little sitting-room, dimly lit by the pallid-globed lamp, which left in twilight the outlines of the furniture, of his writing-table heaped with books and papers, of the tea-roses and jasmine drooping on the mantel-piece. How like home it had all grown—how like home!

"Lydia, what is wrong?" he repeated.

She moved away from him, feeling for her hatpins and turning to lay her hat and sunshade on the table.

Suddenly she said: "That woman has been talking to me."

Gannett stared.

"That woman? What woman?"

"Mrs. Linton—Mrs. Cope."

He gave a start of annoyance, still, as she perceived, not grasping the full import of her words.

"The deuce! She told you—?"

"She told me everything."

Gannett looked at her anxiously.

"What impudence! I'm so sorry that you should have been exposed to this, dear."

"Exposed!" Lydia laughed.

Gannett's brow clouded and they looked away from each other.

"Do you know *why* she told me? She had the best of reasons. The first time she laid eyes on me she saw that we were both in the same box."

"Lydia!"

"So it was natural, of course, that she should turn to me in a difficulty."

"What difficulty?"

"It seems she has reason to think that Lord Trevenna's people are trying to get him away from her before she gets her divorce—"

"Well?"

"And she fancied he had been consulting with you last night as to—as to the best way of escaping from her." Gannett stood up with an angry forehead.

"Well—what concern of yours was all this dirty business? Why should she go to you?"

"Don't you see? It's so simple. I was to wheedle his secret out of you."

"To oblige that woman?"

"Yes; or, if I was unwilling to oblige her, then to protect myself."

"To protect yourself? Against whom?"

“Against her telling every one in the hotel that she and I are in the same box.”

“She threatened that?”

“She left me the choice of telling it myself or of doing it for me.”

“The beast!”

There was a long silence. Lydia had seated herself on the sofa, beyond the radius of the lamp, and he leaned against the window. His next question surprised her.

“When did this happen? At what time, I mean?”

She looked at him vaguely.

“I don’t know—after luncheon, I think. Yes, I remember; it must have been at about three o’clock.”

He stepped into the middle of the room and as he approached the light she saw that his brow had cleared.

“Why do you ask?” she said.

“Because when I came in, at about half-past three, the mail was just being distributed, and Mrs. Cope was waiting as usual to pounce on her letters; you know she was always watching for the postman. She was standing so close to me that I couldn’t help seeing a big official-looking envelope that was handed to her. She tore it open, gave one look at the inside, and rushed off upstairs like a whirlwind, with the director shouting after her that she had left all her other letters behind. I don’t believe she ever thought of you again after that paper was put into her hand.”

“Why?”

“Because she was too busy. I was sitting in the window, watching for you, when the five o’clock boat left, and who should go on board, bag and baggage, valet and maid, dressing-bags and poodle, but Mrs. Cope and Trevenna. Just an hour and a half to pack up in! And you should have seen her when they started. She was radiant—shaking hands with everybody—waving her handkerchief from the deck—distributing bows and smiles like an empress. If ever a woman got what she wanted just in the nick of time that woman did. She’ll be

Lady Trevenna within a week, I'll wager."

"You think she has her divorce?"

"I'm sure of it. And she must have got it just after her talk with you."

Lydia was silent.

At length she said, with a kind of reluctance, "She was horribly angry when she left me. It wouldn't have taken long to tell Lady Susan Condit."

"Lady Susan Condit has not been told."

"How do you know?"

"Because when I went downstairs half an hour ago I met Lady Susan on the way—"

He stopped, half smiling.

"Well?"

"And she stopped to ask if I thought you would act as patroness to a charity concert she is getting up."

In spite of themselves they both broke into a laugh. Lydia's ended in sobs and she sank down with her face hidden. Gannett bent over her, seeking her hands.

"That vile woman—I ought to have warned you to keep away from her; I can't forgive myself! But he spoke to me in confidence; and I never dreamed—well, it's all over now."

Lydia lifted her head.

"Not for me. It's only just beginning."

"What do you mean?"

She put him gently aside and moved in her turn to the window. Then she went on, with her face turned toward the shimmering blackness of the lake, "You see of course that it might happen again at any moment."

"What?"

"This—this risk of being found out. And we could hardly count again on such a lucky combination of chances, could we?" He sat down with a groan.

Still keeping her face toward the darkness, she said, "I want you to go and tell Lady Susan—and the others."

Gannett, who had moved towards her, paused a few feet off.

"Why do you wish me to do this?" he said at length, with less surprise in his voice than she had been prepared for.

"Because I've behaved basely, abominably, since we came here: letting these people believe we were married—lying with every breath I drew—"

"Yes, I've felt that too," Gannett exclaimed with sudden energy.

The words shook her like a tempest: all her thoughts seemed to fall about her in ruins.

"You—you've felt so?"

"Of course I have." He spoke with low-voiced vehemence. "Do you suppose I like playing the sneak any better than you do? It's damnable."

He had dropped on the arm of a chair, and they stared at each other like blind people who suddenly see.

"But you have liked it here," she faltered.

"Oh, I've liked it—I've liked it." He moved impatiently. "Haven't you?"

"Yes," she burst out; "that's the worst of it—that's what I can't bear. I fancied it was for your sake that I insisted on staying—because you thought you could write here; and perhaps just at first that really was the reason. But afterwards I wanted to stay myself—I loved it." She broke into a laugh. "Oh, do you see the full derision of it? These people—the very prototypes of the bores you took me away from, with the same fenced-in view of life, the same keep-off-the-grass morality, the same little cautious virtues and the same little frightened vices—well, I've clung to them, I've delighted in them, I've done my best to please them. I've toadied Lady Susan, I've gossipped with Miss Pinsent, I've pretended to be shocked with Mrs. Ainger. Respectability! It was the one thing in life that I was sure I didn't care about, and it's grown so precious to me that I've stolen it

because I couldn't get it in any other way."

She moved across the room and returned to his side with another laugh.

"I who used to fancy myself unconventional! I must have been born with a card-case in my hand. You should have seen me with that poor woman in the garden. She came to me for help, poor creature, because she fancied that, having 'sinned,' as they call it, I might feel some pity for others who had been tempted in the same way. Not I! She didn't know me. Lady Susan would have been kinder, because Lady Susan wouldn't have been afraid. I hated the woman—my one thought was not to be seen with her—I could have killed her for guessing my secret. The one thing that mattered to me at that moment was my standing with Lady Susan!"

Gannett did not speak.

"And you—you've felt it too!" she broke out accusingly. "You've enjoyed being with these people as much as I have; you've let the chaplain talk to you by the hour about 'The Reign of Law' and Professor Drummond. When they asked you to hand the plate in church I was watching you—you *wanted to accept*."

She stepped close, laying her hand on his arm.

"Do you know, I begin to see what marriage is for. It's to keep people away from each other. Sometimes I think that two people who love each other can be saved from madness only by the things that come between them—children, duties, visits, bores, relations—the things that protect married people from each other. We've been too close together—that has been our sin. We've seen the nakedness of each other's souls."

She sank again on the sofa, hiding her face in her hands.

Gannett stood above her perplexedly: he felt as though she were being swept away by some implacable current while he stood helpless on its bank.

At length he said, "Lydia, don't think me a brute—but don't you see yourself that it won't do?"

"Yes, I see it won't do," she said without raising her head. His face cleared.

"Then we'll go to-morrow."

"Go—where?"

"To Paris; to be married."

For a long time she made no answer; then she asked slowly, "Would they have us here if we were married?"

"Have us here?"

"I mean Lady Susan—and the others."

"Have us here? Of course they would."

"Not if they knew—at least, not unless they could pretend not to know."

He made an impatient gesture.

"We shouldn't come back here, of course; and other people needn't know—no one need know."

She sighed. "Then it's only another form of deception and a meaner one. Don't you see that?"

"I see that we're not accountable to any Lady Susans on earth!"

"Then why are you ashamed of what we are doing here?" "Because I'm sick of pretending that you're my wife when you're not—when you won't be."

She looked at him sadly.

"If I were your wife you'd have to go on pretending. You'd have to pretend that I'd never been—anything else. And our friends would have to pretend that they believed what you pretended."

Gannett pulled off the sofa-tassel and flung it away. "You're impossible," he groaned.

"It's not I—it's our being together that's impossible. I only want you to see that marriage won't help it."

"What will help it then?"

She raised her head.

"My leaving you."

"Your leaving me?" He sat motionless, staring at the tassel which

lay at the other end of the room. At length some impulse of retaliation for the pain she was inflicting made him say deliberately:

“And where would you go if you left me?”

“Oh!” she cried, wincing.

He was at her side in an instant.

“Lydia—Lydia—you know I didn’t mean it; I couldn’t mean it! But you’ve driven me out of my senses; I don’t know what I’m saying. Can’t you get out of this labyrinth of self-torture? It’s destroying us both.”

“That’s why I must leave you.”

“How easily you say it!” He drew her hands down and made her face him. “You’re very scrupulous about yourself—and others. But have you thought of me? You have no right to leave me unless you’ve ceased to care—”

“It’s because I care—”

“Then I have a right to be heard. If you love me you can’t leave me.”

Her eyes defied him.

“Why not?”

He dropped her hands and rose from her side.

“Can you?” he said sadly.

The hour was late and the lamp flickered and sank. She stood up with a shiver and turned toward the door of her room.

V

At daylight a sound in Lydia’s room woke Gannett from a troubled sleep. He sat up and listened. She was moving about softly, as though fearful of disturbing him. He heard her push back one of the creaking shutters; then there was a moment’s silence, which seemed to indicate that she was waiting to see if the noise had roused him.

Presently she began to move again. She had spent a sleepless night, probably, and was dressing to go down to the garden for a breath of air. Gannett rose also; but some undefinable instinct made his

movements as cautious as hers. He stole to his window and looked out through the slats of the shutter.

It had rained in the night and the dawn was gray and lifeless. The cloud-muffled hills across the lake were reflected in its surface as in a tarnished mirror. In the garden, the birds were beginning to shake the drops from the motionless laurustinus-boughs.

An immense pity for Lydia filled Gannett's soul. Her seeming intellectual independence had blinded him for a time to the feminine cast of her mind. He had never thought of her as a woman who wept and clung: there was a lucidity in her intuitions that made them appear to be the result of reasoning. Now he saw the cruelty he had committed in detaching her from the normal conditions of life; he felt, too, the insight with which she had hit upon the real cause of their suffering. Their life was "impossible," as she had said—and its worst penalty was that it had made any other life impossible for them. Even had his love lessened, he was bound to her now by a hundred ties of pity and self-reproach; and she, poor child! must turn back to him as Latude returned to his cell . . .

A new sound startled him: it was the stealthy closing of Lydia's door. He crept to his own and heard her footsteps passing down the corridor. Then he went back to the window and looked out.

A minute or two later he saw her go down the steps of the porch and enter the garden. From his post of observation her face was invisible, but something about her appearance struck him. She wore a long travelling cloak and under its folds he detected the outline of a bag or bundle. He drew a deep breath and stood watching her.

She walked quickly down the laurustinus alley toward the gate; there she paused a moment, glancing about the little shady square. The stone benches under the trees were empty, and she seemed to gather resolution from the solitude about her, for she crossed the square to the steam-boat landing, and he saw her pause before the ticket-office at the head of the wharf. Now she was buying her ticket. Gannett turned his head a moment to look at the clock: the boat was

due in five minutes. He had time to jump into his clothes and overtake her—

He made no attempt to move; an obscure reluctance restrained him. If any thought emerged from the tumult of his sensations, it was that he must let her go if she wished it. He had spoken last night of his rights: what were they? At the last issue, he and she were two separate beings, not made one by the miracle of common forbearances, duties, abnegations, but bound together in a *noyade* of passion that left them resisting yet clinging as they went down.

After buying her ticket, Lydia had stood for a moment looking out across the lake; then he saw her seat herself on one of the benches near the landing. He and she, at that moment, were both listening for the same sound: the whistle of the boat as it rounded the nearest promontory. Gannett turned again to glance at the clock: the boat was due now.

Where would she go? What would her life be when she had left him? She had no near relations and few friends. There was money enough . . . but she asked so much of life, in ways so complex and immaterial. He thought of her as walking barefooted through a stony waste. No one would understand her —no one would pity her—and he, who did both, was powerless to come to her aid . . .

He saw that she had risen from the bench and walked toward the edge of the lake. She stood looking in the direction from which the steamboat was to come; then she turned to the ticket-office, doubtless to ask the cause of the delay. After that she went back to the bench and sat down with bent head. What was she thinking of?

The whistle sounded; she started up, and Gannett involuntarily made a movement toward the door. But he turned back and continued to watch her. She stood motionless, her eyes on the trail of smoke that preceded the appearance of the boat. Then the little craft rounded the point, a dead-white object on the leaden water: a minute later it was puffing and backing at the wharf.

The few passengers who were waiting—two or three peasants and

a snuffy priest—were clustered near the ticket-office. Lydia stood apart under the trees.

The boat lay alongside now; the gang-plank was run out and the peasants went on board with their baskets of vegetables, followed by the priest. Still Lydia did not move. A bell began to ring querulously; there was a shriek of steam, and some one must have called to her that she would be late, for she started forward, as though in answer to a summons. She moved waveringly, and at the edge of the wharf she paused. Gannett saw a sailor beckon to her; the bell rang again and she stepped upon the gang-plank.

Half-way down the short incline to the deck she stopped again; then she turned and ran back to the land. The gangplank was drawn in, the bell ceased to ring, and the boat backed out into the lake. Lydia, with slow steps, was walking toward the garden . . .

As she approached the hotel she looked up furtively and Gannett drew back into the room. He sat down beside a table; a Bradshaw lay at his elbow, and mechanically, without knowing what he did, he began looking out the trains to Paris . . .

The Twilight of the God

A *Newport drawing-room. Tapestries, flowers, bric-a-brac. Through the windows, a geranium-edged lawn, the cliffs and the sea. Isabel Warland sits reading. Lucius Warland enters in flannels and a yachting-cap.*

Isabel. Back already?

Warland. The wind dropped—it turned into a drifting race. Langham took me off the yacht on his launch. What time is it? Two o'clock? Where's Mrs. Raynor?

Isabel. On her way to New York.

Warland. To New York?

Isabel. Precisely. The boat must be just leaving; she started an hour ago and took Laura with her. In fact I'm alone in the house—that is, until this evening. Some people are coming then.

Warland. But what in the world—

Isabel. Her aunt, Mrs. Griscom, has had a fit. She has them constantly. They're not serious—at least they wouldn't be, if Mrs. Griscom were not so rich—and childless. Naturally, under the circumstances, Marian feels a peculiar sympathy for her; her position is such a sad one; there's positively no one to care whether she lives or dies—except her heirs. Of course they all rush to Newburgh whenever she has a fit. It's hard on Marian, for she lives the farthest away; but she has come to an understanding with the housekeeper, who always telegraphs her first, so that she gets a start of several hours. She will be at Newburgh to-night at ten, and she has

calculated that the others can't possibly arrive before midnight.

Warland. You have a delightful way of putting things. I suppose you'd talk of me like that.

Isabel. Oh, no. It's too humiliating to doubt one's husband's disinterestedness.

Warland. I wish I had a rich aunt who had fits.

Isabel. If I were wishing I should choose heart-disease.

Warland. There's no doing anything without money or influence.

Isabel (picking up her book). Have you heard from Washington?

Warland. Yes. That's what I was going to speak of when I asked for Mrs. Raynor. I wanted to bid her good-bye.

Isabel. You're going?

Warland. By the five train. Fagott has just wired me that the Ambassador will be in Washington on Monday. He hasn't named his secretaries yet, but there isn't much hope for me. He has a nephew—

Isabel. They always have. Like the Popes.

Warland. Well, I'm going all the same. You'll explain to Mrs. Raynor if she gets back before I do? Are there to be people at dinner? I don't suppose it matters. You can always pick up an extra man on a Saturday.

Isabel. By the way, that reminds me that Marian left me a list of the people who are arriving this afternoon. My novel is so absorbing that I forgot to look at it. Where can it be? Ah, here— Let me see: the Jack Merringtons, Adelaide Clinton, Ned Lender—all from New York, by seven P.M. train. Lewis Darley to-night, by Fall River boat. John Oberville, from Boston at five P.M. Why, I didn't know—

Warland (excitedly). John Oberville? John Oberville? Here? To-day at five o'clock? Let me see—let me look at the list. Are you sure you're not mistaken? Why, she never said a word! Why the deuce didn't you tell me?

Isabel. I didn't know.

Warland. Oberville—Oberville—!

Isabel. Why, what difference does it make?

Warland. What difference? What difference? Don't look at me as if you didn't understand English! Why, if Oberville's coming—(*a pause*) Look here, Isabel, didn't you know him very well at one time?

Isabel. Very well—yes.

Warland. I thought so—of course—I remember now; I heard all about it before I met you. Let me see—didn't you and your mother spend a winter in Washington when he was Under-secretary of State?

Isabel. That was before the deluge.

Warland. I remember—it all comes back to me. I used to hear it said that he admired you tremendously; there was a report that you were engaged. Don't you remember? Why, it was in all the papers. By Jove, Isabel, what a match that would have been!

Isabel. You *are* disinterested!

Warland. Well, I can't help thinking—

Isabel. That I paid you a handsome compliment?

Warland (preoccupied). Eh?—Ah, yes—exactly. What was I saying? Oh—about the report of your engagement. (*Playfully.*) He was awfully gone on you, wasn't he?

Isabel. It's not for me to diminish your triumph.

Warland. By Jove, I can't think why Mrs. Raynor didn't tell me he was coming. A man like that—one doesn't take him for granted, like the piano-tuner! I wonder I didn't see it in the papers.

Isabel. Is he grown such a great man?

Warland. Oberville? Great? John Oberville? I'll tell you what he is—the power behind the throne, the black Pope, the King-maker and all the rest of it. Don't you read the papers? Of course I'll never get on if you won't interest yourself in politics. And to think you might have married that man!

Isabel. And got you your secretaryship!

Warland. Oberville has them all in the hollow of his hand.

Isabel. Well, you'll see him at five o'clock.

Warland. I don't suppose he's ever heard of *me*, worse luck! (*A silence.*) Isabel, look here. I never ask questions, do I? But it was so

long ago—and Oberville almost belongs to history—he will one of these days at any rate. Just tell me—did he want to marry you?

Isabel. Since you answer for his immortality—(after a pause) I was very much in love with him.

Warland. Then of course he did. (Another pause.) But what in the world—

Isabel (musing). As you say, it was so long ago; I don't see why I shouldn't tell you. There was a married woman who had—what is the correct expression?—made sacrifices for him. There was only one sacrifice she objected to making— and he didn't consider himself free. It sounds rather *rococo*, doesn't it? It was odd that she died the year after we were married.

Warland. Whew!

Isabel (following her own thoughts). I've never seen him since; it must be ten years ago. I'm certainly thirty-two, and I was just twenty-two then. It's curious to talk of it. I had put it away so carefully. How it smells of camphor! And what an old-fashioned cut it has! (Rising.) Where's the list, Lucius? You wanted to know if there were to be people at dinner tonight—

Warland. Here it is—but never mind. Isabel—(silence) Isabel—

Isabel. Well?

Warland. It's odd he never married.

Isabel. The comparison is to my disadvantage. But then I met you.

Warland. Don't be so confoundedly sarcastic. I wonder how he'll feel about seeing you. Oh, I don't mean any sentimental rot, of course . . . but you're an uncommonly agreeable woman. I daresay he'll be pleased to see you again; you're fifty times more attractive than when I married you.

Isabel. I wish your other investments had appreciated at the same rate. Unfortunately my charms won't pay the butcher.

Warland. Damn the butcher!

Isabel. I happened to mention him because he's just written again; but I might as well have said the baker or the candlestick-maker. The

candlestick-maker—I wonder what he is, by the way? He must have more faith in human nature than the others, for I haven't heard from him yet. I wonder if there is a Creditor's Polite Letter-writer they all consult; their style is so exactly alike. I advise you to pass through New York incognito on your way to Washington; their attentions might be oppressive.

Warland. Confoundedly oppressive. What a dog's life it is! My poor Isabel—

Isabel. Don't pity me. I didn't marry you for a home.

Warland (after a pause). What *did* you marry me for, if you cared for Oberville? (*Another pause.*) Eh?

Isabel. Don't make me regret my confidence.

Warland. I beg your pardon.

Isabel. Oh, it was only a subterfuge to conceal the fact that I have no distinct recollection of my reasons. The fact is, a girl's motives in marrying are like a passport—apt to get mislaid. One is so seldom asked for either. But mine certainly couldn't have been mercenary: I never heard a mother praise you to her daughters.

Warland. No, I never was much of a match.

Isabel. You impugn my judgment.

Warland. If I only had a head for business, now, I might have done something by this time. But I'd sooner break stones in the road.

Isabel. It must be very hard to get an opening in that profession. So many of my friends have aspired to it, and yet I never knew any one who actually did it.

Warland. If I could only get the secretaryship. How that kind of life would suit you! It's as much for you that I want it—

Isabel. And almost as much for the butcher. Don't belittle the circle of your benevolence. (*She walks across the room.*) Three o'clock already—and Marian asked me to give orders about the carriages. Let me see—Mr. Oberville is the first arrival; if you'll ring I will send word to the stable. I suppose you'll stay now?

Warland. Stay?

Isabel. Not go to Washington. I thought you spoke as if he could help you.

Warland. He could settle the whole thing in five minutes. The President can't refuse him anything. But he doesn't know me; he may have a candidate of his own. It's a pity you haven't seen him for so long—and yet I don't know; perhaps it's just as well. The others don't arrive till seven? It seems as if— How long is he going to be here? Till to-morrow night, I suppose? I wonder what he's come for. The Merringtons will bore him to death, and Adelaide, of course, will be philandering with Lender. I wonder (*a pause*) if Darley likes boating. (*Rings the bell.*)

Isabel. Boating?

Warland. Oh, I was only thinking— Where are the matches? One may smoke here, I suppose? (*He looks at his wife.*) If I were you I'd put on that black gown of yours tonight—the one with the spangles.—It's only that Fred Langham asked me to go over to Narragansett in his launch to-morrow morning, and I was thinking that I might take Darley; I always liked Darley.

Isabel (to the footman who enters). Mrs. Raynor wishes the dog-cart sent to the station at five o'clock to meet Mr. Oberville.

Footman. Very good, m'm. Shall I serve tea at the usual time, m'm?

Isabel. Yes. That is, when Mr. Oberville arrives.

Footman (going out). Very good, m'm.

Warland (to Isabel, who is moving toward the door). Where are you going?

Isabel. To my room now—for a walk later.

Warland. Later? It's past three already.

Isabel. I've no engagement this afternoon.

Warland. Oh, I didn't know. (*As she reaches the door.*) You'll be back, I suppose?

Isabel. I have no intention of eloping.

Warland. For tea, I mean?

Isabel. I never take tea. (*Warland shrugs his shoulders.*)

The same drawing-room. Isabel enters from the lawn in hat and gloves. The tea-table is set out, and the footman just lighting the lamp under the kettle.

Isabel. You may take the tea-things away. I never take tea.

Footman. Very good, m'm. (*He hesitates.*) I understood, m'm, that Mr. Oberville was to have tea?

Isabel. Mr. Oberville? But he was to arrive long ago! What time is it?

Footman. Only a quarter past five, m'm.

Isabel. A quarter past five? (*She goes up to the clock.*) Surely you're mistaken? I thought it was long after six. (*To herself.*) I walked and walked—I must have walked too fast . . . (*To the Footman.*) I'm going out again. When Mr. Oberville arrives please give him his tea without waiting for me. I shall not be back till dinner-time.

Footman. Very good, m'm. Here are some letters, m'm.

Isabel (*glancing at them with a movement of disgust*). You may send them up to my room.

Footman. I beg pardon, m'm, but one is a note from Mme Fanfreluche, and the man who brought it is waiting for an answer.

Isabel. Didn't you tell him I was out?

Footman. Yes, m'm. But he said he had orders to wait till you came in.

Isabel. Ah—let me see. (*She opens the note.*) Ah, yes. (*A pause.*) Please say that I am on my way now to Mme Fanfreluche's to give her the answer in person. You may tell the man that I have already started. Do you understand? Already started.

Footman. Yes, m'm.

Isabel. And—wait. (*With an effort.*) You may tell *me* when the man has started. I shall wait here till then. Be sure you let me know.

Footman. Yes, m'm. (*He goes out.*)

Isabel (*sinking into a chair and hiding her face*). Ah! (*After a moment*

she rises, taking up her gloves and sun-shade, and walks toward the window which opens on the lawn.) I'm so tired. (She hesitates and turns back into the room.) Where can I go to? (She sits down again by the tea-table, and bends over the kettle. The clock strikes half-past five.)

Isabel (picking up her sunshade, walks back to the window). If I must meet one of them . . .

Oberville (speaking in the hall). Thanks. I'll take tea first. (He enters the room, and pauses doubtfully on seeing Isabel.)

Isabel (stepping towards him with a smile). It's not that I've changed, of course, but only that I happened to have my back to the light. Isn't that what you are going to say?

Oberville. Mrs. Warland!

Isabel. So you really have become a great man! They always remember people's names.

Oberville. Were you afraid I was going to call you Isabel?

Isabel. Bravo! Crescendo!

Oberville. But you have changed, all the same.

Isabel. You must indeed have reached a dizzy eminence, since you can indulge yourself by speaking the truth!

Oberville. It's your voice. I knew it at once, and yet it's different.

Isabel. I hope it can still convey the pleasure I feel in seeing an old friend. (She holds out her hand. He takes it.) You know, I suppose, that Mrs. Raynor is not here to receive you? She was called away this morning very suddenly by her aunt's illness.

Oberville. Yes. She left a note for me. (Absently.) I'm sorry to hear of Mrs. Griscom's illness.

Isabel. Oh, Mrs. Griscom's illnesses are less alarming than her recoveries. But I am forgetting to offer you any tea. (She hands him a cup.) I remember you liked it very strong.

Oberville. What else do you remember?

Isabel. A number of equally useless things. My mind is a store-room of obsolete information.

Oberville. Why obsolete, since I am providing you with a use for it?

Isabel. At any rate, it's open to question whether it was worth storing for that length of time. Especially as there must have been others more fitted—by opportunity—to undertake the duty.

Oberville. The duty?

Isabel. Of remembering how you like your tea.

Oberville (with a change of tone). Since you call it a duty—I may remind you that it's one I have never asked any one else to perform.

Isabel. As a duty! But as a pleasure?

Oberville. Do you really want to know?

Isabel. Oh, I don't require and charge you.

Oberville. You dislike as much as ever having the *i*'s dotted?

Isabel. With a handwriting I know as well as yours!

Oberville (recovering his lightness of manner). Accomplished woman! (*He examines her approvingly.*) I'd no idea that you were here. I never was more surprised.

Isabel. I hope you like being surprised. To my mind it's an overrated pleasure.

Oberville. Is it? I'm sorry to hear that.

Isabel. Why? Have you a surprise to dispose of?

Oberville. I'm not sure that I haven't.

Isabel. Don't part with it too hastily. It may improve by being kept.

Oberville (tentatively). Does that mean that you don't want it?

Isabel. Heaven forbid! I want everything I can get.

Oberville. And you get everything you want. At least you used to.

Isabel. Let us talk of your surprise.

Oberville. It's to be yours, you know. (*A pause. He speaks gravely.*) I find that I've never got over having lost you.

Isabel (also gravely). And is that a surprise—to you too?

Oberville. Honestly—yes. I thought I'd crammed my life full. I didn't know there was a cranny left anywhere. At first, you know, I stuffed in everything I could lay my hands on—there was such a big void to fill. And after all I haven't filled it. I felt that the moment I saw you. (*A pause.*) I'm talking stupidly.

Isabel. It would be odious if you were eloquent.

Oberville. What do you mean?

Isabel. That's a question you never used to ask me.

Oberville. Be merciful. Remember how little practise I've had lately.

Isabel. In what?

Oberville. Never mind! (*He rises and walks away; then comes back and stands in front of her.*) What a fool I was to give you up!

Isabel. Oh, don't say that! I've lived on it!

Oberville. On my letting you go?

Isabel. On your letting everything go—but the right.

Oberville. Oh, hang the right! What is truth? We had the right to be happy!

Isabel (with rising emotion). I used to think so sometimes.

Oberville. Did you? Triple fool that I was!

Isabel. But you showed me—

Oberville. Why, good God, we belonged to each other—and I let you go! It's fabulous. I've fought for things since that weren't worth a crooked sixpence; fought as well as other men. And you—you—I lost you because I couldn't face a scene! Hang it, suppose there'd been a dozen scenes—I might have survived them. Men have been known to. They're not necessarily fatal.

Isabel. A scene?

Oberville. It's a form of fear that women don't understand. How you must have despised me!

Isabel. You were—afraid—of a scene?

Oberville. I was a damned coward, Isabel. That's about the size of it.

Isabel. Ah—I had thought it so much larger!

Oberville. What did you say?

Isabel. I said that you have forgotten to drink your tea. It must be quite cold.

Oberville. Ah—

Isabel. Let me give you another cup.

Oberville (collecting himself). No—no. This is perfect.

Isabel. You haven't tasted it.

Oberville (falling into her mood). You always made it to perfection. Only you never gave me enough sugar.

Isabel. I know better now. *(She puts another lump in his cup.)*

Oberville (drinks his tea, and then says, with an air of reproach). Isn't all this chaff rather a waste of time between two old friends who haven't met for so many years?

Isabel (lightly). Oh, it's only a *hors d'œuvre*—the tuning of the instruments. I'm out of practise too.

Oberville. Let us come to the grand air, then. *(Sits down near her.)* Tell me about yourself. What are you doing?

Isabel. At this moment? You'll never guess. I'm trying to remember you.

Oberville. To remember me?

Isabel. Until you came into the room just now my recollection of you was so vivid; you were a living whole in my thoughts. Now I am engaged in gathering up the fragments—in laboriously reconstructing you. . . .

Oberville. I have changed so much, then?

Isabel. No, I don't believe that you've changed. It's only that I see you differently. Don't you know how hard it is to convince elderly people that the type of the evening paper is no smaller than when they were young?

Oberville. I've shrunk then?

Isabel. You couldn't have grown bigger. Oh, I'm serious now; you needn't prepare a smile. For years you were the tallest object on my horizon. I used to climb to the thought of you, as people who live in a flat country mount the church steeple for a view. It's wonderful how much I used to see from there! And the air was so strong and pure!

Oberville. And now?

Isabel. Now I can fancy how delightful it must be to sit next to you

at dinner.

Oberville. You're unmerciful. Have I said anything to offend you?

Isabel. Of course not. How absurd!

Oberville. I lost my head a little—I forgot how long it is since we have met. When I saw you I forgot everything except what you had once been to me. (*She is silent.*) I thought you too generous to resent that. Perhaps I have overtaxed your generosity. (*A pause.*) Shall I confess it? When I first saw you I thought for a moment that you had remembered—as I had. You see I can only excuse myself by saying something inexcusable.

Isabel (deliberately). Not inexcusable.

Oberville. Not—?

Isabel. I had remembered.

Oberville. Isabel!

Isabel. But now—

Oberville. Ah, give me a moment before you unsay it!

Isabel. I don't mean to unsay it. There's no use in repealing an obsolete law. That's the pity of it! You say you lost me ten years ago. (*A pause.*) I never lost you till now.

Oberville. Now?

Isabel. Only this morning you were my supreme court of justice; there was no appeal from your verdict. Not an hour ago you decided a case for me—against myself! And now—. And the worst of it is that it's not because you've changed. How do I know if you've changed? You haven't said a hundred words to me. You haven't been an hour in the room. And the years must have enriched you—I daresay you've doubled your capital. You've been in the thick of life, and the metal you're made of brightens with use. Success on some men looks like a borrowed coat; it sits on you as though it had been made to order. I see all this; I know it; but I don't *feel* it. I don't feel anything . . . anywhere . . . I'm numb. (*A pause.*) Don't laugh, but I really don't think I should know now if you came into the room—unless I actually saw you. (*They are both silent.*)

Oberville (*at length*). Then, to put the most merciful interpretation upon your epigrams, your feeling for me was made out of poorer stuff than mine for you.

Isabel. Perhaps it has had harder wear.

Oberville. Or been less cared for?

Isabel. If one has only one cloak one must wear it in all weathers.

Oberville. Unless it is so beautiful and precious that one prefers to go cold and keep it under lock and key.

Isabel. In the cedar-chest of indifference—the key of which is usually lost.

Oberville. Ah, Isabel, you're too pat! How much I preferred your hesitations.

Isabel. My hesitations? That reminds me how much your coming has simplified things. I feel as if I'd had an auction sale of fallacies.

Oberville. You speak in enigmas, and I have a notion that your riddles are the reverse of the sphinx's—more dangerous to guess than to give up. And yet I used to find your thoughts such good reading.

Isabel. One cares so little for the style in which one's praises are written.

Oberville. You've been praising me for the last ten minutes and I find your style detestable. I would rather have you find fault with me like a friend than approve me like a *dilettante*.

Isabel. A *dilettante*! The very word I wanted!

Oberville. I am proud to have enriched so full a vocabulary. But I am still waiting for the word *I* want. (*He grows serious.*) Isabel, look in your heart—give me the first word you find there. You've no idea how much a beggar can buy with a penny!

Isabel. It's empty, my poor friend, it's empty.

Oberville. Beggars never say that to each other.

Isabel. No; never, unless it's true.

Oberville (*after another silence*). Why do you look at me so curiously?

Isabel. I'm—what was it you said? Approving you as a *dilettante*.

Don't be alarmed; you can bear examination; I don't see a crack anywhere. After all, it's a satisfaction to find that one's idol makes a handsome *biblot*.

Oberville (with an attempt at lightness). I was right then—you're a collector?

Isabel (modestly). One must make a beginning. I think I shall begin with you. *(She smiles at him.)* Positively, I must have you on my mantel-shelf! *(She rises and looks at the clock.)* But it's time to dress for dinner. *(She holds out her hand to him and he kisses it. They look at each other, and it is clear that he does not quite understand, but is watching eagerly for his cue.)*

Warland (coming in). Hullo, Isabel—you're here after all?

Isabel. And so is Mr. Oberville. *(She looks straight at Warland.)* I stayed in on purpose to meet him. My husband — *(The two men bow.)*

Warland (effusively). So glad to meet you. My wife talks of you so often. She's been looking forward tremendously to your visit.

Oberville. It's a long time since I've had the pleasure of seeing Mrs. Warland.

Isabel. But now we are going to make up for lost time. *(As he goes to the door.)* I claim you to-morrow for the whole day.

Oberville bows and goes out.

Isabel. Lucius . . . I think you'd better go to Washington, after all. *(Musing.)* Narragansett might do for the others, though. . . . Couldn't you get Fred Langham to ask all the rest of the party to go over there with him to-morrow morning? I shall have a headache and stay at home. *(He looks at her doubtfully.)* Mr. Oberville is a bad sailor.

Warland advances demonstratively.

Isabel (drawing back). It's time to go and dress. I think you said the black gown with spangles?

A Cup of Cold Water

IT WAS three o'clock in the morning, and the cotillion was at its height, when Woburn left the over-heated splendor of the Gildermere ball-room, and after a delay caused by the determination of the drowsy footman to give him a ready-made overcoat with an imitation astrachan collar in place of his own unimpeachable Poole garment, found himself breasting the icy solitude of the Fifth Avenue. He was still smiling, as he emerged from the awning, at his insistence in claiming his own overcoat: it illustrated, humorously enough, the invincible force of habit. As he faced the wind, however, he discerned a providence in his persistency, for his coat was fur-lined, and he had a cold voyage before him on the morrow.

It had rained hard during the earlier part of the night, and the carriages waiting in triple line before the Gildermeres' door were still domed by shining umbrellas, while the electric lamps extending down the avenue blinked Narcissus-like at their watery images in the hollows of the sidewalk. A dry blast had come out of the north, with pledge of frost before daylight, and to Woburn's shivering fancy the pools in the pavement seemed already stiffening into ice. He turned up his coat-collar and stepped out rapidly, his hands deep in his coat-pockets.

As he walked he glanced curiously up at the ladder-like door-steps which may well suggest to the future archæologist that all the streets of New York were once canals; at the spectral tracery of the trees about St. Luke's, the fretted mass of the Cathedral, and the mean vista of the long side-streets. The knowledge that he was perhaps

looking at it all for the last time caused every detail to start out like a challenge to memory, and lit the brown-stone house-fronts with the glamor of sword-barred Edens.

It was an odd impulse that had led him that night to the Gildermere ball; but the same change in his condition which made him stare wonderingly at the houses in the Fifth Avenue gave the thrill of an exploit to the tame business of ball-going. Who would have imagined, Woburn mused, that such a situation as his would possess the priceless quality of sharpening the blunt edge of habit?

It was certainly curious to reflect, as he leaned against the doorway of Mrs. Gildermere's ball-room, enveloped in the warm atmosphere of the accustomed, that twenty-four hours later the people brushing by him with looks of friendly recognition would start at the thought of having seen him and slur over the recollection of having taken his hand!

And the girl he had gone there to see: what would she think of him? He knew well enough that her trenchant classifications of life admitted no overlapping of good and evil, made no allowance for that incalculable interplay of motives that justifies the subtlest casuistry of compassion. Miss Talcott was too young to distinguish the intermediate tints of the moral spectrum; and her judgments were further simplified by a peculiar concreteness of mind. Her bringing-up had fostered this tendency and she was surrounded by people who focussed life in the same way. To the girls in Miss Talcott's set, the attentions of a clever man who had to work for his living had the zest of a forbidden pleasure; but to marry such a man would be as unpardonable as to have one's carriage seen at the door of a cheap dress-maker. Poverty might make a man fascinating; but a settled income was the best evidence of stability of character. If there were anything in heredity, how could a nice girl trust a man whose parents had been careless enough to leave him unprovided for?

Neither Miss Talcott nor any of her friends could be charged with formulating these views; but they were implicit in the slope of every

white shoulder and in the ripple of every yard of imported tulle dappling the foreground of Mrs. Gildermere's ball-room. The advantages of line and colour in veiling the crudities of a creed are obvious to emotional minds; and besides, Woburn was conscious that it was to the cheerful materialism of their parents that the young girls he admired owed that fine distinction of outline in which their skilfully-rippled hair and skilfully-hung draperies coöperated with the slimness and erectness that came of participating in the most expensive sports, eating the most expensive food and breathing the most expensive air. Since the process which had produced them was so costly, how could they help being costly themselves? Woburn was too logical to expect to give no more for a piece of old Sèvres than for a bit of kitchen crockery; he had no faith in wonderful bargains, and believed that one got in life just what one was willing to pay for. He had no mind to dispute the taste of those who preferred the rustic simplicity of the earthen crock; but his own fancy inclined to the piece of *pâte tendre* which must be kept in a glass case and handled as delicately as a flower.

It was not merely by the external grace of these drawing-room ornaments that Woburn's sensibilities were charmed. His imagination was touched by the curious exoticism of view resulting from such conditions. He had always enjoyed listening to Miss Talcott even more than looking at her. Her ideas had the brilliant bloom and audacious irrelevance of those tropical orchids which strike root in air. Miss Talcott's opinions had no connection with the actual; her very materialism had the grace of artificiality. Woburn had been enchanted once by seeing her helpless before a smoking lamp: she had been obliged to ring for a servant because she did not know how to put it out.

Her supreme charm was the simplicity that comes of taking it for granted that people are born with carriages and country-places: it never occurred to her that such congenital attributes could be matter for self-consciousness, and she had none of the *nouveau riche* prudery

which classes poverty with the nude in art and is not sure how to behave in the presence of either.

The conditions of Woburn's own life had made him peculiarly susceptible to those forms of elegance which are the flower of ease. His father had lost a comfortable property through sheer inability to go over his agent's accounts; and this disaster, coming at the outset of Woburn's school-days, had given a new bent to the family temperament. The father characteristically died when the effort of living might have made it possible to retrieve his fortunes; and Woburn's mother and sister, embittered by this final evasion, settled down to a vindictive war with circumstances. They were the kind of women who think that it lightens the burden of life to throw over the amenities, as a reduced housekeeper puts away her knick-knacks to make the dusting easier. They fought mean conditions meanly; but Woburn, in his resentment of their attitude, did not allow for the suffering which had brought it about: his own tendency was to overcome difficulties by conciliation rather than by conflict. Such surroundings threw into vivid relief the charming figure of Miss Talcott. Woburn instinctively associated poverty with bad food, ugly furniture, complaints and recriminations: it was natural that he should be drawn toward the luminous atmosphere where life was a series of peaceful and good-humored acts, unimpeded by petty obstacles. To spend one's time in such society gave one the illusion of unlimited credit; and also, unhappily, created the need for it.

It was here in fact that Woburn's difficulties began. To marry Miss Talcott it was necessary to be a rich man: even to dine out in her set involved certain minor extravagances. Woburn had determined to marry her sooner or later; and in the meanwhile to be with her as much as possible.

As he stood leaning in the doorway of the Gildermere ballroom, watching her pass him in the waltz, he tried to remember how it had begun. First there had been the tailor's bill; the fur-lined overcoat with cuffs and collar of Alaska sable had alone cost more than he had

spent on his clothes for two or three years previously. Then there were theatre-tickets; cab-fares; florist's bills; tips to servants at the country-houses where he went because he knew that she was invited; the *Omar Khayydm* bound by Sullivan that he sent her at Christmas; the contributions to her pet charities; the reckless purchases at fairs where she had a stall. His whole way of life had imperceptibly changed and his year's salary was gone before the second quarter was due.

He had invested the few thousand dollars which had been his portion of his father's shrunken estate: when his debts began to pile up, he took a flyer in stocks and after a few months of varying luck his little patrimony disappeared. Meanwhile his courtship was proceeding at an inverse ratio to his financial ventures. Miss Talcott was growing tender and he began to feel that the game was in his hands. The nearness of the goal exasperated him. She was not the girl to wait and he knew that it must be now or never. A friend lent him five thousand dollars on his personal note and he bought railway stocks on margin. They went up and he held them for a higher rise: they fluctuated, dragged, dropped below the level at which he had bought, and slowly continued their uninterrupted descent. His broker called for more margin; he could not respond and was sold out.

What followed came about quite naturally. For several years he had been cashier in a well-known banking-house. When the note he had given his friend became due it was obviously necessary to pay it and he used the firm's money for the purpose. To repay the money thus taken, he increased his debt to his employers and bought more stocks; and on these operations he made a profit of ten thousand dollars. Miss Talcott rode in the Park, and he bought a smart hack for seven hundred, paid off his tradesmen, and went on speculating with the remainder of his profits. He made a little more, but failed to take advantage of the market and lost all that he had staked, including the amount taken from the firm. He increased his over-draft by another ten thousand and lost that; he over-drew a farther sum and

lost again. Suddenly he woke to the fact that he owed his employers fifty thousand dollars and that the partners were to make their semi-annual inspection in two days. He realized then that within forty-eight hours what he had called borrowing would become theft.

There was no time to be lost: he must clear out and start life over again somewhere else. The day that he reached this decision he was to have met Miss Talcott at dinner. He went to the dinner, but she did not appear: she had a headache, his hostess explained. Well, he was not to have a last look at her, after all; better so, perhaps. He took leave early and on his way home stopped at a florist's and sent her a bunch of violets. The next morning he got a little note from her: the violets had done her head so much good—she would tell him all about it that evening at the Gildermere ball. Woburn laughed and tossed the note into the fire. That evening he would be on board ship: the examination of the books was to take place the following morning at ten.

Woburn went down to the bank as usual; he did not want to do anything that might excite suspicion as to his plans, and from one or two questions which one of the partners had lately put to him he divined that he was being observed. At the bank the day passed uneventfully. He discharged his business with his accustomed care and went uptown at the usual hour.

In the first flush of his successful speculations he had set up bachelor lodgings, moved by the temptation to get away from the dismal atmosphere of home, from his mother's struggles with the cook and his sister's curiosity about his letters. He had been influenced also by the wish for surroundings more adapted to his tastes. He wanted to be able to give little teas, to which Miss Talcott might come with a married friend. She came once or twice and pronounced it all delightful: she thought it so nice to have only a few Whistler etchings on the walls and the simplest crushed levant for all one's books.

To these rooms Woburn returned on leaving the bank. His plans

had taken definite shape. He had engaged passage on a steamer sailing for Halifax early the next morning; and there was nothing for him to do before going on board but to pack his clothes and tear up a few letters. He threw his clothes into a couple of portmanteaux, and when these had been called for by an expressman he emptied his pockets and counted up his ready money. He found that he possessed just fifty dollars and seventy-five cents; but his passage to Halifax was paid, and once there he could pawn his watch and rings. This calculation completed, he unlocked his writing-table drawer and took out a handful of letters. They were notes from Miss Talcott. He read them over and threw them into the fire. On his table stood her photograph. He slipped it out of its frame and tossed it on top of the blazing letters. Having performed this rite, he got into his dress-clothes and went to a small French restaurant to dine.

He had meant to go on board the steamer immediately after dinner; but a sudden vision of introspective hours in a silent cabin made him call for the evening paper and run his eye over the list of theatres. It would be as easy to go on board at midnight as now.

He selected a new vaudeville and listened to it with surprising freshness of interest; but toward eleven o'clock he again began to dread the approaching necessity of going down to the steamer. There was something peculiarly unnerving in the idea of spending the rest of the night in a stifling cabin jammed against the side of a wharf.

He left the theatre and strolled across to the Fifth Avenue. It was now nearly midnight and a stream of carriages poured up town from the opera and the theatres. As he stood on the corner watching the familiar spectacle it occurred to him that many of the people driving by him in smart broughams and C-spring landaus were on their way to the Gildermere ball. He remembered Miss Talcott's note of the morning and wondered if she were in one of the passing carriages; she had spoken so confidently of meeting him at the ball. What if he should go and take a last look at her? There was really nothing to prevent it. He was not likely to run across any member of the firm: in

Miss Talcott's set his social standing was good for another ten hours at least. He smiled in anticipation of her surprise at seeing him, and then reflected with a start that she would not be surprised at all.

His meditations were cut short by a fall of sleety rain, and hailing a hansom he gave the driver Mrs. Gildermere's address.

As he drove up the avenue he looked about him like a traveller in a strange city. The buildings which had been so unobtrusively familiar stood out with sudden distinctness: he noticed a hundred details which had escaped his observation. The people on the sidewalks looked like strangers: he wondered where they were going and tried to picture the lives they led; but his own relation to life had been so suddenly reversed that he found it impossible to recover his mental perspective.

At one corner he saw a shabby man lurking in the shadow of the side street; as the hansom passed, a policeman ordered him to move on. Farther on, Woburn noticed a woman crouching on the door-step of a handsome house. She had drawn a shawl over her head and was sunk in the apathy of despair or drink. A well-dressed couple paused to look at her. The electric globe at the corner lit up their faces, and Woburn saw the lady, who was young and pretty, turn away with a little grimace, drawing her companion after her.

The desire to see Miss Talcott had driven Woburn to the Gildermere's; but once in the ball-room he made no effort to find her. The people about him seemed more like strangers than those he had passed in the street. He stood in the doorway, studying the petty manoeuvres of the women and the resigned amenities of their partners. Was it possible that these were his friends? These mincing women, all paint and dye and whalebone, these apathetic men who looked as much alike as the figures that children cut out of a folded sheet of paper? Was it to live among such puppets that he had sold his soul? What had any of these people done that was noble, exceptional, distinguished? Who knew them by name even, except their tradesmen and the society reporters? Who were they, that they

should sit in judgment on him?

The bald man with the globular stomach, who stood at Mrs. Gildermere's elbow surveying the dancers, was old Boylston, who had made his pile in wrecking railroads; the smooth chap with glazed eyes, at whom a pretty girl smiled up so confidently, was Collerton, the political lawyer, who had been mixed up to his own advantage in an ugly lobbying transaction; near him stood Brice Lyndham, whose recent failure had ruined his friends and associates, but had not visibly affected the welfare of his large and expensive family. The slim fellow dancing with Miss Gildermere was Alec Vance, who lived on a salary of five thousand a year, but whose wife was such a good manager that they kept a brougham and victoria and always put in their season at Newport and their spring trip to Europe. The little ferret-faced youth in the corner was Regie Colby, who wrote the *Entre-Noes* paragraphs in the *Social Searchlight*: the women were charming to him and he got all the financial tips he wanted from their husbands and fathers.

And the women? Well, the women knew all about the men, and flattered them and married them and tried to catch them for their daughters. It was a domino-party at which the guests were forbidden to unmask, though they all saw through each other's disguises.

And these were the people who, within twenty-four hours, would be agreeing that they had always felt there was something wrong about Woburn! They would be extremely sorry for him, of course, poor devil; but there are certain standards, after all—what would society be without standards? His new friends, his future associates, were the suspicious-looking man whom the policeman had ordered to move on, and the drunken woman asleep on the door-step. To these he was linked by the freemasonry of failure.

Miss Talcott passed him on Collerton's arm: she was giving him one of the smiles of which Woburn had fancied himself sole owner. Collerton was a sharp fellow; he must have made a lot in that last deal; probably she would marry him. How much did she know about

the transaction? She was a shrewd girl and her father was in Wall Street. If Woburn's luck had turned the other way she might have married him instead; and if he had confessed his sin to her one evening, as they drove home from the opera in their new brougham, she would have said that really it was of no use to tell her, for she never *could* understand about business, but that she did entreat him in future to be nicer to Regie Colby. Even now, if he made a big strike somewhere, and came back in ten years with a beard and a steam yacht, they would all deny that anything had been proved against him, and Mrs. Collerton might blush and remind him of their friendship. Well—why not? Was not all morality based on a convention? What was the stanchest code of ethics but a trunk with a series of false bottoms? Now and then one had the illusion of getting down to absolute right or wrong, but it was only a false bottom—a removable hypothesis—with another false bottom underneath. There was no getting beyond the relative.

The cotillion had begun. Miss Talcott sat nearly opposite him: she was dancing with young Boylston and giving him a Woburn-Collerton smile. So young Boylston was in the syndicate too!

Presently Woburn was aware that she had forgotten young Boylston and was glancing absently about the room. She was looking for some one, and meant the some one to know it: he knew that *Lost-Chord* look in her eyes.

A new figure was being formed. The partners circled about the room and Miss Talcott's flying tulle drifted close to him as she passed. Then the favors were distributed; white skirts wavered across the floor like thistle-down on summer air; men rose from their seats and fresh couples filled the shining *parquet*.

Miss Talcott, after taking from the basket a Legion of Honor in red enamel, surveyed the room for a moment; then she made her way through the dancers and held out the favor to Woburn. He fastened it in his coat, and emerging from the crowd of men about the doorway, slipped his arm about her. Their eyes met; hers were serious and a

little sad. How fine and slender she was! He noticed the little tendrils of hair about the pink convolution of her ear. Her waist was firm and yet elastic; she breathed calmly and regularly, as though dancing were her natural motion. She did not look at him again and neither of them spoke.

When the music ceased they paused near her chair. Her partner was waiting for her and Woburn left her with a bow.

He made his way down-stairs and out of the house. He was glad that he had not spoken to Miss Talcott. There had been a healing power in their silence. All bitterness had gone from him and he thought of her now quite simply, as the girl he loved.

At Thirty-fifth Street he reflected that he had better jump into a car and go down to his steamer. Again there rose before him the repulsive vision of the dark cabin, with creaking noises overhead, and the cold wash of water against the pier: he thought he would stop in a café and take a drink. He turned into Broadway and entered a brightly-lit café; but when he had taken his whisky and soda there seemed no reason for lingering. He had never been the kind of man who could escape difficulties in that way. Yet he was conscious that his will was weakening; that he did not mean to go down to the steamer just yet. What did he mean to do? He began to feel horribly tired and it occurred to him that a few hours' sleep in a decent bed would make a new man of him. Why not go on board the next morning at daylight?

He could not go back to his rooms, for on leaving the house he had taken the precaution of dropping his latch-key into his letter-box; but he was in a neighborhood of discreet hotels and he wandered on till he came to one which was known to offer a dispassionate hospitality to luggageless travellers in dress-clothes.

II

He pushed upon the swinging door and found himself in a long corridor with a tessellated floor, at the end of which, in a brightly-lit

enclosure of plate-glass and mahogany, the night-clerk dozed over a copy of the *Police Gazette*. The air in the corridor was rich in reminiscences of yesterday's dinners, and a bronzed radiator poured a wave of dry heat into Woburn's face.

The night-clerk, roused by the swinging of the door, sat watching Woburn's approach with the unexpectant eye of one who has full confidence in his capacity for digesting surprises. Not that there was anything surprising in Woburn's appearance; but the night-clerk's callers were given to such imaginative flights in explaining their luggageless arrival in the small hours of the morning, that he fared habitually on fictions which would have staggered a less experienced stomach. The night-clerk, whose unwrinkled bloom showed that he thrived on this high-seasoned diet, had a fancy for classifying his applicants before they could frame their explanations.

"This one's been locked out," he said to himself as he mustered Woburn.

Having exercised his powers of divination with his accustomed accuracy he listened without stirring an eye-lid to Woburn's statement; merely replying, when the latter asked the price of a room, "Two-fifty."

"Very well," said Woburn, pushing the money under the brass lattice, "I'll go up at once; and I want to be called at seven."

To this the night-clerk proffered no reply, but stretching out his hand to press an electric button, returned apathetically to the perusal of the *Police Gazette*. His summons was answered by the appearance of a man in shirt-sleeves, whose rumpled head indicated that he had recently risen from some kind of makeshift repose; to him the night-clerk tossed a key, with the brief comment, "Ninety-seven;" and the man, after a sleepy glance at Woburn, turned on his heel and lounged toward the staircase at the back of the corridor.

Woburn followed and they climbed three flights in silence. At each landing Woburn glanced down the long passage-way lit by a lowered gas-jet, with a double line of boots before the doors, waiting, like

yesterday's deeds, to carry their owners so many miles farther on the morrow's destined road. On the third landing the man paused, and after examining the number on the key, turned to the left, and slouching past three or four doors, finally unlocked one and preceded Woburn into a room lit only by the upward gleam of the electric globes in the street below.

The man felt in his pockets; then he turned to Woburn. "Got a match?" he asked.

Woburn politely offered him one, and he applied it to the gas-fixture which extended its jointed arm above an ash dressing-table with a blurred mirror fixed between two standards. Having performed this office with an air of detachment designed to make Woburn recognize it as an act of supererogation, he turned without a word and vanished down the passage-way.

Woburn, after an indifferent glance about the room, which seemed to afford the amount of luxury generally obtainable for two dollars and a half in a fashionable quarter of New York, locked the door and sat down at the ink-stained writing-table in the window. Far below him lay the pallidly-lit depths of the forsaken thoroughfare. Now and then he heard the jingle of a horse-car and the ring of hoofs on the freezing pavement, or saw the lonely figure of a policeman eclipsing the illumination of the plate-glass windows on the opposite side of the street. He sat thus for a long time, his elbows on the table, his chin between his hands, till at length the contemplation of the abandoned sidewalks, above which the electric globes kept Stylites-like vigil, became intolerable to him, and he drew down the window-shade, and lit the gas-fixture beside the dressing-table. Then he took a cigar from his case, and held it to the flame.

The passage from the stinging freshness of the night to the stale overheated atmosphere of the Haslemere Hotel had checked the preternaturally rapid working of his mind, and he was now scarcely conscious of thinking at all. His head was heavy, and he would have thrown himself on the bed had he not feared to oversleep the hour

fixed for his departure. He thought it safest, instead, to seat himself once more by the table, in the most uncomfortable chair that he could find, and smoke one cigar after another till the first sign of dawn should give an excuse for action.

He had laid his watch on the table before him, and was gazing at the hour-hand, and trying to convince himself by so doing that he was still wide awake, when a noise in the adjoining room suddenly straightened him in his chair and banished all fear of sleep.

There was no mistaking the nature of the noise; it was that of a woman's sobs. The sobs were not loud, but the sound reached him distinctly through the frail door between the two rooms; it expressed an utter abandonment to grief; not the cloud-burst of some passing emotion, but the slow downpour of a whole heaven of sorrow.

Woburn sat listening. There was nothing else to be done; and at least his listening was a mute tribute to the trouble he was powerless to relieve. It roused, too, the drugged pulses of his own grief: he was touched by the chance propinquity of two alien sorrows in a great city throbbing with multifarious passions. It would have been more in keeping with the irony of life had he found himself next to a mother singing her child to sleep: there seemed a mute commiseration in the hand that had led him to such neighborhood.

Gradually the sobs subsided, with pauses betokening an effort at self-control. At last they died off softly, like the intermittent drops that end a day of rain.

"Poor soul," Woburn mused, "she's got the better of it for the time. I wonder what it's all about?"

At the same moment he heard another sound that made him jump to his feet. It was a very low sound, but in that nocturnal silence which gives distinctness to the faintest noises, Woburn knew at once that he had heard the click of a pistol.

"What is she up to now?" he asked himself, with his eye on the door between the two rooms; and the brightly-lit keyhole seemed to reply with a glance of intelligence. He turned out the gas and crept

to the door, pressing his eye to the illuminated circle.

After a moment or two of adjustment, during which he seemed to himself to be breathing like a steam-engine, he discerned a room like his own, with the same dressing-table Ranked by gas-fixtures, and the same table in the window. This table was directly in his line of vision; and beside it stood a woman with a small revolver in her hands. The lights being behind her, Woburn could only infer her youth from her slender silhouette and the nimbus of fair hair defining her head. Her dress seemed dark and simple, and on a chair under one of the gas-jets lay a jacket edged with cheap fur and a small travelling-bag. He could not see the other end of the room, but something in her manner told him that she was alone. At length she put the revolver down and took up a letter that lay on the table. She drew the letter from its envelope and read it over two or three times; then she put it back, sealing the envelope, and placing it conspicuously against the mirror of the dressing-table.

There was so grave a significance in this dumb-show that Woburn felt sure that her next act would be to return to the table and take up the revolver; but he had not reckoned on the vanity of woman. After putting the letter in place she still lingered at the mirror, standing a little sideways, so that he could now see her face, which was distinctly pretty, but of a small and unelastic mould, inadequate to the expression of the larger emotions. For some moments she continued to study herself with the expression of a child looking at a playmate who has been scolded; then she turned to the table and lifted the revolver to her forehead.

A sudden crash made her arm drop, and sent her darting backward to the opposite side of the room. Woburn had broken down the door, and stood torn and breathless in the breach.

“Oh!” she gasped, pressing closer to the wall.

“Don’t be frightened,” he said; “I saw what you were going to do and I had to stop you.”

She looked at him for a moment in silence, and he saw the

terrified flutter of her breast; then she said, "No one can stop me for long. And besides, what right have you—"

"Every one has the right to prevent a crime," he returned, the sound of the last word sending the blood to his forehead.

"I deny it," she said passionately. "Every one who has tried to live and failed has the right to die."

"Failed in what?"

"In everything!" she replied. They stood looking at each other in silence.

At length he advanced a few steps.

"You've no right to say you've failed," he said, "while you have breath to try again." He drew the revolver from her hand.

"Try again—try again? I tell you I've tried seventy times seven!"

"What have you tried?"

She looked at him with a certain dignity.

"I don't know," she said, "that you've any right to question me—or to be in this room at all—" and suddenly she burst into tears.

The discrepancy between her words and action struck the chord which, in a man's heart, always responds to the touch of feminine unreason. She dropped into the nearest chair, hiding her face in her hands, while Woburn watched the course of her weeping.

At last she lifted her head, looking up between drenched lashes.

"Please go away," she said in childish entreaty.

"How can I?" he returned. "It's impossible that I should leave you in this state. Trust me—let me help you. Tell me what has gone wrong, and let's see if there's no other way out of it."

Woburn had a voice full of sensitive inflections, and it was now trembling with profoundest pity. Its note seemed to reassure the girl, for she said, with a beginning of confidence in her own tones, "But I don't even know who you are."

Woburn was silent: the words startled him. He moved nearer to her and went on in the same quieting tone.

"I am a man who has suffered enough to want to help others. I

don't want to know any more about you than will enable me to do what I can for you. I've probably seen more of life than you have, and if you're willing to tell me your troubles perhaps together we may find a way out of them."

She dried her eyes and glanced at the revolver.

"That's the only way out," she said.

"How do you know? Are you sure you've tried every other?"

"Perfectly sure. I've written and written, and humbled myself like a slave before him, and she won't even let him answer my letters. Oh, but you don't understand"—she broke off with a renewal of weeping.

"I begin to understand—you're sorry for something you've done?"

"Oh, I've never denied that—I've never denied that I was wicked."

"And you want the forgiveness of some one you care about?"

"My husband," she whispered.

"You've done something to displease your husband?"

"To displease him? I ran away with another man!" There was a dismal exultation in her tone, as though she were paying Woburn off for having underrated her offense.

She had certainly surprised him; at worst he had expected a quarrel over a rival, with a possible complication of mother-in-law. He wondered how such helpless little feet could have taken so bold a step; then he remembered that there is no audacity like that of weakness.

He was wondering how to lead her to complete avowal when she added forlornly, "You see there's nothing else to do."

Woburn took a turn in the room. It was certainly a narrower strait than he had foreseen, and he hardly knew how to answer; but the first flow of confession had eased her, and she went on without farther persuasion.

"I don't know how I could ever have done it; I must have been downright crazy. I didn't care much for Joe when I married him—he wasn't exactly handsome, and girls think such a lot of that. But he

just laid down and worshipped me, and I *was* getting fond of him in a way; only the life was so dull. I'd been used to a big city—I come from Detroit—and Hinksville is such a poky little place; that's where we lived; Joe is telegraph-operator on the railroad there. He'd have been in a much bigger place now, if he hadn't—well, after all, he behaved perfectly splendidly about *that*.

“I really was getting fond of him, and I believe I should have realized in time how good and noble and unselfish he was, if his mother hadn't been always sitting there and everlastingly telling me so. We learned in school about the Athenians hating some man who was always called just, and that's the way I felt about Joe. Whenever I did anything that wasn't quite right his mother would say how differently Joe would have done it. And she was forever telling me that Joe didn't approve of this and that and the other. When we were alone he approved of everything, but when his mother was round he'd sit quiet and let her say he didn't. I knew he'd let me have my way afterwards, but somehow that didn't prevent my getting mad at the time.

“And then the evenings were so long, with Joe away, and Mrs. Glenn (that's his mother) sitting there like an image knitting socks for the heathen. The only caller we ever had was the Baptist minister, and he never took any more notice of me than if I'd been a piece of furniture. I believe he was afraid to before Mrs. Glenn.”

She paused breathlessly, and the tears in her eyes were now of anger.

“Well?” said Woburn gently.

“Well—then Arthur Hackett came along; he was travelling for a big publishing firm in Philadelphia. He was awfully handsome and as clever and sarcastic as anything. He used to lend me lots of novels and magazines, and tell me all about society life in New York. All the girls were after him, and Alice Sprague, whose father is the richest man in Hinksville, fell desperately in love with him and carried on like a fool; but he wouldn't take any notice of her. He never looked

at anybody but me.” Her face lit up with a reminiscent smile, and then clouded again. “I hate him now,” she exclaimed, with a change of tone that startled Woburn. “I’d like to kill him—but he’s killed me instead.

“Well, he bewitched me so I didn’t know what I was doing; I was like somebody in a trance. When he wasn’t there I didn’t want to speak to anybody; I used to lie in bed half the day just to get away from folks; I hated Joe and Hinksville and everything else. When he came back the days went like a flash; we were together nearly all the time. I knew Joe’s mother was spying on us, but I didn’t care. And at last it seemed as if I couldn’t let him go away again without me; so one evening he stopped at the back gate in a buggy, and we drove off together and caught the eastern express at River Bend. He promised to bring me to New York.” She paused, and then added scornfully, “He didn’t even do that!”

Woburn had returned to his seat and was watching her attentively. It was curious to note how her passion was spending itself in words; he saw that she would never kill herself while she had any one to talk to.

“That was five months ago,” she continued, “and we travelled all through the southern states, and stayed a little while near Philadelphia, where his business is. He did things real stylishly at first. Then he was sent to Albany, and we stayed a week at the Delavan House. One afternoon I went out to do some shopping, and when I came back he was gone. He had taken his trunk with him, and hadn’t left any address; but in my travelling-bag I found a fifty-dollar bill, with a slip of paper on which he had written, ‘No use coming after me; I’m married.’ We’d been together less than four months, and I never saw him again.

“At first I couldn’t believe it. I stayed on, thinking it was a joke—or that he’d feel sorry for me and come back. But he never came and never wrote me a line. Then I began to hate him, and to see what a wicked fool I’d been to leave Joe. I was so lonesome—I thought I’d

go crazy. And I kept thinking how good and patient Joe had been, and how badly I'd used him, and how lovely it would be to be back in the little parlor at Hinksville, even with Mrs. Glenn and the minister talking about free-will and predestination. So at last I wrote to Joe. I wrote him the humblest letters you ever read, one after another; but I never got any answer.

"Finally I found I'd spent all my money, so I sold my watch and my rings—Joe gave me a lovely turquoise ring when we were married—and came to New York. I felt ashamed to stay alone any longer in Albany; I was afraid that some of Arthur's friends, who had met me with him on the road, might come there and recognize me. After I got here I wrote to Susy Price, a great friend of mine who lives in Hinksville, and she answered at once, and told me just what I had expected—that Joe was ready to forgive me and crazy to have me back, but that his mother wouldn't let him stir a step or write me a line, and that she and the minister were at him all day long, telling him how bad I was and what a sin it would be to forgive me. I got Susy's letter two or three days ago, and after that I saw it was no use writing to Joe. He'll never dare go against his mother and she watches him like a cat. I suppose I deserve it—but he might have given me another chance! I know he would if he could only see me."

Her voice had dropped from anger to lamentation, and her tears again overflowed.

Woburn looked at her with the pity one feels for a child who is suddenly confronted with the result of some unpremeditated naughtiness.

"But why not go back to Hinksville," he suggested, "if your husband is ready to forgive you? You could go to your friend's house, and once your husband knows you are there you can easily persuade him to see you."

"Perhaps I could—Susy thinks I could. But I can't go back; I haven't got a cent left."

"But surely you can borrow money? Can't you ask your friend to

forward you the amount of your fare?"

She shook her head.

"Susy ain't well off; she couldn't raise five dollars, and it costs twenty-five to get back to Hinksville. And besides, what would become of me while I waited for the money? They'll turn me out of here to-morrow; I haven't paid my last week's board, and I haven't got anything to give them; my bag's empty; I've pawned everything."

"And don't you know any one here who would lend you the money?"

"No; not a soul. At least I do know one gentleman; he's a friend of Arthur's, a Mr. Devine; he was staying at Rochester when we were there. I met him in the street the other day, and I didn't mean to speak to him, but he came up to me, and said he knew all about Arthur and how meanly he had behaved, and he wanted to know if he couldn't help me—I suppose he saw I was in trouble. He tried to persuade me to go and stay with his aunt, who has a lovely house right round here in Twenty-fourth Street; he must be very rich, for he offered to lend me as much money as I wanted."

"You didn't take it?"

"No," she returned; "I daresay he meant to be kind, but I didn't care to be beholden to any friend of Arthur's. He came here again yesterday, but I wouldn't see him, so he left a note giving me his aunt's address and saying she'd have a room ready for me at any time."

There was a long silence; she had dried her tears and sat looking at Woburn with eyes full of helpless reliance.

"Well," he said at length, "you did right not to take that man's money; but this isn't the only alternative," he added, pointing to the revolver.

"I don't know any other," she answered wearily. "I'm not smart enough to get employment; I can't make dresses or do type-writing, or any of the useful things they teach girls now; and besides, even if I could get work I couldn't stand the loneliness. I can never hold my

head up again—I can't bear the disgrace. If I can't go back to Joe I'd rather be dead."

"And if you go back to Joe it will be all right?" Woburn suggested with a smile.

"Oh," she cried, her whole face alight, "if I could only go back to Joe!"

They were both silent again; Woburn sat with his hands in his pockets gazing at the floor. At length his silence seemed to rouse her to the unwontedness of the situation, and she rose from her seat, saying in a more constrained tone, "I don't know why I've told you all this."

"Because you believed that I would help you," Woburn answered, rising also; "and you were right; I'm going to send you home."

She colored vividly.

"You told me I was right not to take Mr. Devine's money," she faltered.

"Yes," he answered, "but did Mr. Devine want to send you home?"

"He wanted me to wait at his aunt's a little while first and then write to Joe again."

"I don't—I want you to start to-morrow morning; this morning, I mean. I'll take you to the station and buy your ticket, and your husband can send me back the money."

"Oh, I can't—I can't—you mustn't—" she stammered, reddening and paling. "Besides, they'll never let me leave here without paying."

"How much do you owe?"

"Fourteen dollars."

"Very well; I'll pay that for you; you can leave me your revolver as a pledge. But you must start by the first train; have you any idea at what time it leaves the Grand Central?"

"I think there's one at eight."

He glanced at his watch.

"In less than two hours, then; it's after six now."

She stood before him with fascinated eyes.

"You must have a very strong will," she said. "When you talk like that you make me feel as if I had to do everything you say."

"Well, you must," said Woburn lightly. "Man was made to be obeyed."

"Oh, you're not like other men," she returned; "I never heard a voice like yours; it's so strong and kind. You must be a very good man; you remind me of Joe; I'm sure you've got just such a nature; and Joe is the best man I've ever seen."

Woburn made no reply, and she rambled on, with little pauses and fresh bursts of confidence.

"Joe's a real hero, you know; he did the most splendid thing you ever heard of. I think I began to tell you about it, but I didn't finish. I'll tell you now. It happened just after we were married; I was mad with him at the time, I'm afraid, but now I see how splendid he was. He'd been telegraph operator at Hinksville for four years and was hoping that he'd get promoted to a bigger place; but he was afraid to ask for a raise. Well, I was very sick with a bad attack of pneumonia and one night the doctor said he wasn't sure whether he could pull me through. When they sent word to Joe at the telegraph office he couldn't stand being away from me another minute. There was a poor consumptive boy always hanging round the station; Joe had taught him how to operate, just to help him along; so he left him in the office and tore home for half an hour, knowing he could get back before the eastern express came along.

"He hadn't been gone five minutes when a freight-train ran off the rails about a mile up the track. It was a very still night, and the boy heard the smash and shouting, and knew something had happened. He couldn't tell what it was, but the minute he heard it he sent a message over the wires like a Rash, and caught the eastern express just as it was pulling out of the station above Hinksville. If he'd hesitated a second, or made any mistake, the express would have come on, and the loss of life would have been fearful. The next day the Hinksville papers were full of Operator Glenn's presence of mind;

they all said he'd be promoted. That was early in November and Joe didn't hear anything from the company till the first of January. Meanwhile the boy had gone home to his father's farm out in the country, and before Christmas he was dead. Well, on New Year's day Joe got a notice from the company saying that his pay was to be raised, and that he was to be promoted to a big junction near Detroit, in recognition of his presence of mind in stopping the eastern express. It was just what we'd both been pining for and I was nearly wild with joy; but I noticed Joe didn't say much. He just telegraphed for leave, and the next day he went right up to Detroit and told the directors there what had really happened. When he came back he told us they'd suspended him; I cried every night for a week, and even his mother said he was a fool. After that we just lived on at Hinksville, and six months later the company took him back; but I don't suppose they'll ever promote him now."

Her voice again trembled with facile emotion.

"Wasn't it beautiful of him? Ain't he a real hero?" she said. "And I'm sure you'd behave just like him; you'd be just as gentle about little things, and you'd never move an inch about big ones. You'd never do a mean action, but you'd be sorry for people who did; I can see it in your face; that's why I trusted you right off."

Woburn's eyes were fixed on the window; he hardly seemed to hear her. At length he walked across the room and pulled up the shade. The electric lights were dissolving in the gray alembic of the dawn. A milk-cart rattled down the street and, like a witch returning late from the Sabbath, a stray cat whisked into an area. So rose the appointed day.

Woburn turned back, drawing from his pocket the roll of bills which he had thrust there with so different a purpose. He counted them out, and handed her fifteen dollars.

"That will pay for your board, including your breakfast this morning," he said. "We'll breakfast together presently if you like; and meanwhile suppose we sit down and watch the sunrise. I haven't

seen it for years.”

He pushed two chairs toward the window, and they sat down side by side. The light came gradually, with the icy reluctance of winter; at last a red disk pushed itself above the opposite house-tops and a long cold gleam slanted across their window. They did not talk much; there was a silencing awe in the spectacle.

Presently Woburn rose and looked again at his watch.

“I must go and cover up my dress-coat,” he said, “and you had better put on your hat and jacket. We shall have to be starting in half an hour.”

As he turned away she laid her hand on his arm.

“You haven’t even told me your name,” she said.

“No,” he answered; “but if you get safely back to Joe you can call me Providence.”

“But how am I to send you the money?”

“Oh—well, I’ll write you a line in a day or two and give you my address; I don’t know myself what it will be; I’m a wanderer on the face of the earth.”

“But you must have my name if you mean to write to me.” “Well, what is your name?”

“Ruby Glenn. And I think—I almost think you might send the letter right to Joe’s—send it to the Hinksville station.” “Very well.”

“You promise?”

“Of course I promise.”

He went back into his room, thinking how appropriate it was that she should have an absurd name like Ruby. As he reentered the room, where the gas sickened in the daylight, it seemed to him that he was returning to some forgotten land; he had passed, with the last few hours, into a wholly new phase of consciousness. He put on his fur coat, turning up the collar and crossing the lapels to hide his white tie. Then he put his cigar-case in his pocket, turned out the gas, and, picking up his hat and stick, walked back through the open doorway.

Ruby Glenn had obediently prepared herself for departure and was standing before the mirror, patting her curls into place. Her eyes were still red, but she had the happy look of a child that has outslept its grief. On the floor he noticed the tattered fragments of the letter which, a few hours earlier, he had seen her place before the mirror.

“Shall we go down now?” he asked.

“Very well,” she assented; then, with a quick movement, she stepped close to him, and putting her hands on his shoulders lifted her face to his.

“I believe you’re the best man I ever knew,” she said, “the very best—except Joe.”

She drew back blushing deeply, and unlocked the door which led into the passage-way. Woburn picked up her bag, which she had forgotten, and followed her out of the room. They passed a frowzy chambermaid, who stared at them with a yawn. Before the doors the row of boots still waited; there was a faint new aroma of coffee mingling with the smell of vanished dinners, and a fresh blast of heat had begun to tingle through the radiators.

In the unventilated coffee-room they found a waiter who had the melancholy air of being the last survivor of an exterminated race, and who reluctantly brought them some tea made with water which had not boiled, and a supply of stale rolls and staler butter. On this meagre diet they fared in silence, Woburn occasionally glancing at his watch; at length he rose, telling his companion to go and pay her bill while he called a hansom. After all, there was no use in economizing his remaining dollars.

In a few moments she joined him under the portico of the hotel. The hansom stood waiting and he sprang in after her, calling to the driver to take them to the Forty-second Street station.

When they reached the station he found a seat for her and went to buy her ticket. There were several people ahead of him at the window, and when he had bought the ticket he found that it was time to put her in the train. She rose in answer to his glance, and

together they walked down the long platform in the murky chill of the roofed-in air. He followed her into the railway carriage, making sure that she had her bag, and that the ticket was safe inside it; then he held out his hand, in its pearl-coloured evening glove: he felt that the people in the other seats were staring at them.

“Good-bye,” he said.

“Good-bye,” she answered, flushing gratefully. “I’ll never forget—never. And you *will* write, won’t you? Promise.”

“Of course, of course,” he said, hastening from the carriage.

He retraced his way along the platform, passed through the dismal waiting-room and stepped out into the early sunshine. On the sidewalk outside the station he hesitated awhile; then he strolled slowly down Forty-second Street and, skirting the melancholy flank of the Reservoir, walked across Bryant Park. Finally he sat down on one of the benches near the Sixth Avenue and lit a cigar.

The signs of life were multiplying around him; he watched the cars roll by with their increasing freight of dingy toilers, the shop-girls hurrying to their work, the children trudging schoolward, their small vague noses red with cold, their satchels clasped in woollen-gloved hands. There is nothing very imposing in the first stirring of a great city’s activities; it is a slow reluctant process, like the waking of a heavy sleeper; but to Woburn’s mood the sight of that obscure renewal of humble duties was more moving than the spectacle of an army with banners.

He sat for a long time, smoking the last cigar in his case, and murmuring to himself a line from Hamlet—the saddest, he thought, in the play—

For every man hath business and desire.

Suddenly an unpremeditated movement made him feel the pressure of Ruby Glenn’s revolver in his pocket; it was like a devil’s touch on his arm, and he sprang up hastily. In his other pocket there

were just four dollars and fifty cents; but that didn't matter now. He had no thought of flight.

For a few minutes he loitered vaguely about the park; then the cold drove him on again, and with the rapidity born of a sudden resolve he began to walk down the Fifth Avenue towards his lodgings. He brushed past a maid-servant who was washing the vestibule and ran up stairs to his room. A fire was burning in the grate and his books and photographs greeted him cheerfully from the walls; the tranquil air of the whole room seemed to take it for granted that he meant to have his bath and breakfast and go down town as usual.

He threw off his coat and pulled the revolver out of his pocket; for some moments he held it curiously in his hand, bending over to examine it as Ruby Glenn had done; then he laid it in the top drawer of a small cabinet, and locking the drawer threw the key into the fire.

After that he went quietly about the usual business of his toilet. In taking off his dress-coat he noticed the Legion of Honor which Miss Talcott had given him at the ball. He pulled it out of his buttonhole and tossed it into the fireplace. When he had finished dressing he saw with surprise that it was nearly ten o'clock. Ruby Glenn was already two hours nearer home.

Woburn stood looking about the room of which he had thought to take final leave the night before; among the ashes beneath the grate he caught sight of a little white heap which symbolized to his fancy the remains of his brief correspondence with Miss Talcott. He roused himself from this unseasonable musing and with a final glance at the familiar setting of his past, turned to face the future which the last hours had prepared for him.

He went down stairs and stepped out of doors, hastening down the street towards Broadway as though he were late for an appointment. Every now and then he encountered an acquaintance, whom he greeted with a nod and smile; he carried his head high, and shunned

no man's recognition.

At length he reached the doors of a tall granite building honey-combed with windows. He mounted the steps of the portico, and passing through the double doors of plate-glass, crossed a vestibule floored with mosaic to another glass door on which was emblazoned the name of the firm.

This door he also opened, entering a large room with wainscotted subdivisions, behind which appeared the stooping shoulders of a row of clerks.

As Woburn crossed the threshold a gray-haired man emerged from an inner office at the opposite end of the room.

At sight of Woburn he stopped short.

"Mr. Woburn!" he exclaimed; then he stepped nearer and added in a low tone: "I was requested to tell you when you came that the members of the firm are waiting; will you step into the private office?"

The Touchstone

“Professor Joslin, who, as our readers are doubtless aware, is engaged in writing the life of Mrs. Aubyn, asks us to state that he will be greatly indebted to any of the famous novelist’s friends who will furnish him with information concerning the period previous to her coming to England. Mrs. Aubyn had so few intimate friends, and consequently so few regular correspondents, that letters will be of special value. Professor Joslin’s address is 10 Augusta Gardens, Kensington, and he begs us to say that he will promptly return any documents entrusted to him.”

GLENNARD dropped the *Spectator* and sat looking into the fire. The club was filling up, but he still had to himself the small inner room with its darkening outlook down the rain-streaked prospect of Fifth Avenue. It was all dull and dismal enough, yet a moment earlier his boredom had been perversely tinged by a sense of resentment at the thought that, as things were going, he might in time have to surrender even the despised privilege of boring himself within those particular four walls. It was not that he cared much for the club, but that the remote contingency of having to give it up stood to him, just then, perhaps by very reason of its insignificance and remoteness, for the symbol of his increasing abnegations; of that perpetual paring-off that was gradually reducing existence to the naked business of keeping himself alive. It was the futility of his multiplied shifts and privations that made them seem unworthy of a high attitude—the sense that, however rapidly he eliminated the superfluous, his

cleared horizon was likely to offer no nearer view of the one prospect toward which he strained. To give up things in order to marry the woman one loves is easier than to give them up without being brought appreciably nearer to such a conclusion.

Through the open door he saw young Hollingsworth rise with a yawn from the ineffectual solace of a brandy-and-soda and transport his purposeless person to the window. Glennard measured his course with a contemptuous eye. It was so like Hollingsworth to get up and look out of the window just as it was growing too dark to see anything! There was a man rich enough to do what he pleased—had he been capable of being pleased—yet barred from all conceivable achievement by his own impervious dullness; while, a few feet off, Glennard, who wanted only enough to keep a decent coat on his back and a roof over the head of the woman he loved—Glennard, who had sweated, toiled, denied himself for the scant measure of opportunity that his zeal would have converted into a kingdom—sat wretchedly calculating that, even when he had resigned from the club, and knocked off his cigars, and given up his Sundays out of town, he would still be no nearer to attainment.

The *Spectator* had slipped to his feet, and as he picked it up his eye fell again on the paragraph addressed to the friends of Mrs. Aubyn. He had read it for the first time with a scarcely perceptible quickening of attention: her name had so long been public property that his eye passed it unseeing, as the crowd in the street hurries without a glance by some familiar monument.

“Information concerning the period previous to her coming to England. . . .” The words were an evocation. He saw her again as she had looked at their first meeting, the poor woman of genius with her long pale face and short-sighted eyes, softened a little by the grace of youth and inexperience, but so incapable even then of any hold upon the pulses. When she spoke, indeed, she was wonderful, more wonderful, perhaps, than when later, to Glennard’s fancy at least, the consciousness of memorable things uttered seemed to take from even

her most intimate speech the perfect bloom of privacy. It was in those earliest days, if ever, that he had come near loving her; though even then his sentiment had lived only in the intervals of its expression. Later, when to be loved by her had been a state to touch any man's imagination, the physical reluctance had, inexplicably, so overborne the intellectual attraction, that the last years had been, to both of them, an agony of conflicting impulses. Even now, if, in turning over old papers his hand lit on her letters, the touch filled him with inarticulate misery. . . .

"She had so few intimate friends . . . that letters will be of special value." So few intimate friends! For years she had had but one; one who in the last years had requited her wonderful pages, her tragic outpourings of love, humility and pardon, with the scant phrases by which a man evades the vulgarest of sentimental importunities. He had been a brute in spite of himself, and sometimes, now that the remembrance of her face had faded, and only her voice and words remained with him, he chafed at his own inadequacy, his stupid inability to rise to the height of her passion. His egoism was not of a kind to mirror its complacency in the adventure. To have been loved by the most brilliant woman of her day, and to have been incapable of loving her, seemed to him, in looking back, derisive evidence of his limitations; and his remorseful tenderness for her memory was complicated with a sense of irritation against her for having given him once for all the measure of his emotional capacity. It was not often, however, that he thus probed the past. The public, in taking possession of Mrs. Aubyn, had eased his shoulders of their burden. There was something fatuous in an attitude of sentimental apology toward a memory already classic: to reproach one's self for not having loved Margaret Aubyn was a good deal like being disturbed by an inability to admire the Venus of Milo. From her cold niche of fame she looked down ironically enough on his self-flagellations. . . . It was only when he came on something that belonged to her that he felt a sudden renewal of the old feeling, the strange dual impulse that

drew him to her voice but drove him from her hand, so that even now, at sight of anything she had touched, his heart contracted painfully. It happened seldom nowadays. Her little presents, one by one, had disappeared from his rooms, and her letters, kept from some unacknowledged puerile vanity in the possession of such treasures, seldom came beneath his hand. . . .

“Her letters will be of special value—” Her letters! Why, he must have hundreds of them—enough to fill a volume. Sometimes it used to seem to him that they came with every post—he used to avoid looking in his letter-box when he came home to his rooms—but her writing seemed to spring out at him as he put his key in the door.

He stood up and strolled into the other room. Hollingsworth, lounging away from the window, had joined himself to a languidly convivial group of men, to whom, in phrases as halting as though they struggled to define an ultimate idea, he was expounding the cursed nuisance of living in a hole with such a damned climate that one had to get out of it by February, with the contingent difficulty of there being no place to take one’s yacht to in winter but that other played-out hole, the Riviera. From the outskirts of this group Glennard wandered to another, where a voice as different as possible from Hollingsworth’s colorless organ dominated another circle of languid listeners.

“Come and hear Dinslow talk about his patent: admission free,” one of the men sang out in a tone of mock resignation.

Dinslow turned to Glennard the confident pugnacity of his smile. “Give it another six months and it’ll be talking about itself,” he declared. “It’s pretty nearly articulate now.”

“Can it say papa?” someone else inquired.

Dinslow’s smile broadened. “You’ll be deuced glad to say papa to it a year from now,” he retorted. “It’ll be able to support even you in affluence. Look here, now, just let me explain to you—”

Glennard moved away impatiently. The men at the club—all but those who were “in it”—were proverbially “tired” of Dinslow’s

patent, and none more so than Glennard, whose knowledge of its merits made it loom large in the depressing catalogue of lost opportunities. The relations between the two men had always been friendly, and Dinslow's urgent offers to "take him in on the ground floor" had of late intensified Glennard's sense of his own inability to meet good luck half-way. Some of the men who had paused to listen were already in evening clothes, others on their way home to dress; and Glennard, with an accustomed twinge of humiliation, said to himself that if he lingered among them it was in the miserable hope that one of the number might ask him to dine. Miss Trent had told him that she was to go to the opera that evening with her rich aunt; and if he should have the luck to pick up a dinner invitation he might join her there without extra outlay.

He moved about the room, lingering here and there in a tentative affectation of interest; but though the men greeted him pleasantly, no one asked him to dine. Doubtless they were all engaged, these men who could afford to pay for their dinners, who did not have to hunt for invitations as a beggar rummages for a crust in an ash-barrel! But no—as Hollingsworth left the lessening circle about the table, an admiring youth called out, "Holly, stop and dine!"

Hollingsworth turned on him the crude countenance that looked like the wrong side of a more finished face. "Sorry I can't. I'm in for a beastly banquet."

Glennard threw himself into an arm-chair. Why go home in the rain to dress? It was folly to take a cab to the opera, it was worse folly to go there at all. His perpetual meetings with Alexa Trent were as unfair to the girl as they were unnerving to himself. Since he couldn't marry her, it was time to stand aside and give a better man the chance—and his thought admitted the ironical implication that in the terms of expediency the phrase might stand for Hollingsworth.

II

He dined alone and walked home to his rooms in the rain. As he

turned into Fifth Avenue he caught the wet gleam of carriages on their way to the opera, and he took the first side street, in a moment of irritation against the petty restrictions that thwarted every impulse. It was ridiculous to give up the opera, not because one might possibly be bored there, but because one must pay for the experiment.

In his sitting-room, the tacit connivance of the inanimate had centred the lamplight on a photograph of Alexa Trent, placed, in the obligatory silver frame, just where, as memory officiously reminded him, Margaret Aubyn's picture had long throned in its stead. Miss Trent's features cruelly justified the usurpation. She had the kind of beauty that comes of a happy accord of face and spirit. It is not given to many to have the lips and eyes of their rarest mood, and some women go through life behind a mask expressing only their anxiety about the butcher's bill or their inability to see a joke. With Miss Trent, face and mind had the same high serious contour. She looked like a throned Justice by some grave Florentine painter; and it seemed to Glennard that her most salient attribute, or that at least to which her conduct gave most consistent expression, was a kind of passionate justness—the intuitive feminine justness that is so much rarer than a reasoned impartiality. Circumstances had tragically combined to develop this instinct into a conscious habit. She had seen more than most girls of the shabby side of life, of the perpetual tendency of want to cramp the noblest attitude. Poverty and misfortune had overhung her childhood, and she had none of the pretty delusions about life that are supposed to be the crowning grace of girlhood. This very competence, which gave her a touching reasonableness, made Glennard's situation more difficult than if he had aspired to a princess. Between them they asked so little—they knew so well how to make that little do; but they understood also, and she especially did not for a moment let him forget, that without that little the future they dreamed of was impossible.

The sight of her photograph quickened Glennard's exasperation.

He was sick and ashamed of the part he was playing. He had loved her now for two years, with the tranquil tenderness that gathers depth and volume as it nears fulfilment; he knew that she would wait for him—but the certitude was an added pang. There are times when the constancy of the woman one cannot marry is almost as trying as that of the woman one does not want to.

Glennard turned up his reading-lamp and stirred the fire. He had a long evening before him, and he wanted to crowd out thought with action. He had brought some papers from his office and he spread them out on his table and squared himself to the task. . . .

It must have been an hour later that he found himself automatically fitting a key into a locked drawer. He had no more notion than a somnambulist of the mental process that had led up to this action. He was just dimly aware of having pushed aside the papers and the heavy calf volumes that a moment before had bounded his horizon, and of laying in their place, without a trace of conscious volition, the parcel he had taken from the drawer.

The letters were tied in packets of thirty or forty. There were a great many packets. On some of the envelopes the ink was fading; on others, which bore the English postmark, it was still fresh. She had been dead hardly three years, and she had written, at lengthening intervals, to the last. . . .

He undid one of the early packets—little notes written during their first acquaintance at Hillbridge. Glennard, on leaving college, had begun life in his uncle's law office in the old university town. It was there that, at the house of her father, Professor Forth, he had first met the young lady then chiefly distinguished for having, after two years of a conspicuously unhappy marriage, returned to the protection of the paternal roof.

Mrs. Aubyn was at that time an eager and somewhat tragic young woman, of complex mind and undeveloped manners, whom her crude experience of matrimony had fitted out with a stock of generalizations that exploded like bombs in the academic air of

Hillbridge. In her choice of a husband she had been fortunate enough, if the paradox be permitted, to light on one so signally gifted with the faculty of putting himself in the wrong that her leaving him had the dignity of a manifesto—made her, as it were, the spokeswoman of outraged wifeness. In this light she was cherished by that dominant portion of Hillbridge society which was least indulgent to conjugal differences, and which found a proportionate pleasure in being for once able to feast openly on a dish liberally seasoned with the outrageous. So much did this endear Mrs. Aubyn to the university ladies, that they were disposed from the first to allow her more latitude of speech and action than the ill-used wife was generally accorded in Hillbridge, where misfortune was still regarded as a visitation designed to put people in their proper place and make them feel the superiority of their neighbors. The young woman so privileged combined with a kind of personal shyness an intellectual audacity that was like a deflected impulse of coquetry: one felt that if she had been prettier she would have had emotions instead of ideas. She was in fact even then what she had always remained: a genius capable of the acutest generalizations, but curiously undiscerning where her personal susceptibilities were concerned. Her psychology failed her just where it serves most women, and one felt that her brains would never be a guide to her heart. Of all this, however, Glennard thought little in the first year of their acquaintance. He was at an age when all the gifts and graces are but so much indiscriminated food to the ravening egoism of youth. In seeking Mrs. Aubyn's company he was prompted by an intuitive taste for the best as a pledge of his own superiority. The sympathy of the cleverest woman in Hillbridge was balm to his craving for distinction; it was public confirmation of his secret sense that he was cut out for a bigger place. It must not be understood that Glennard was vain. Vanity contents itself with the coarsest diet; there is no palate so fastidious as that of self-distrust. To a youth of Glennard's aspirations the encouragement of a clever woman stood

for the symbol of all success. Later, when he had begun to feel his way, to gain a foothold, he would not need such support; but it served to carry him lightly and easily over what is often a period of insecurity and discouragement.

It would be unjust, however, to represent his interest in Mrs. Aubyn as a matter of calculation. It was as instinctive as love, and it missed being love by just such a hair-breadth deflection from the line of beauty as had determined the curve of Mrs. Aubyn's lips. When they met she had just published her first novel, and Glennard, who afterward had an ambitious man's impatience of distinguished women, was young enough to be dazzled by the semi-publicity it gave her. It was the kind of book that makes elderly ladies lower their voices and call each other "my dear" when they furtively discuss it; and Glennard exulted in the superior knowledge of the world that enabled him to take as a matter of course sentiments over which the university shook its head. Still more delightful was it to hear Mrs. Aubyn waken the echoes of academic drawing-rooms with audacities surpassing those of her printed page. Her intellectual independence gave a touch of comradeship to their intimacy, prolonging the illusion of college friendships based on a joyous interchange of heresies. Mrs. Aubyn and Glennard represented to each other the augur's wink behind the Hillbridge idol: they walked together in that light of young omniscience from which fate so curiously excludes one's elders.

Husbands, who are notoriously inopportune, may even die inopportunely, and this was the revenge that Mr. Aubyn, some two years after her return to Hillbridge, took upon his injured wife. He died precisely at the moment when Glennard was beginning to criticise her. It was not that she bored him; she did what was infinitely worse—she made him feel his inferiority. The sense of mental equality had been gratifying to his raw ambition; but as his self-knowledge defined itself, his understanding of her also increased; and if man is at times indirectly flattered by the moral superiority of

woman, her mental ascendancy is extenuated by no such oblique tribute to his powers. The attitude of looking up is a strain on the muscles; and it was becoming more and more Glennard's opinion that brains, in a woman, should be merely the obverse of beauty. To beauty Mrs. Aubyn could lay no claim; and while she had enough prettiness to exasperate him by her incapacity to make use of it, she seemed invincibly ignorant of any of the little artifices whereby women contrive to hide their defects and even to turn them into graces. Her dress never seemed a part of her; all her clothes had an impersonal air, as though they had belonged to someone else and been borrowed in an emergency that had somehow become chronic. She was conscious enough of her deficiencies to try to amend them by rash imitations of the most approved models; but no woman who does not dress well intuitively will ever do so by the light of reason, and Mrs. Aubyn's plagiarisms, to borrow a metaphor of her trade, somehow never seemed to be incorporated with the text.

Genius is of small use to a woman who does not know how to do her hair. The fame that came to Mrs. Aubyn with her second book left Glennard's imagination untouched, or had at most the negative effect of removing her still farther from the circle of his contracting sympathies. We are all the sport of time; and fate had so perversely ordered the chronology of Margaret Aubyn's romance that when her husband died Glennard felt as though he had lost a friend.

It was not in his nature to be needlessly unkind; and though he was in the impregnable position of the man who has given a woman no more definable claim on him than that of letting her fancy that he loves her, he would not for the world have accentuated his advantage by any betrayal of indifference. During the first year of her widowhood their friendship dragged on with halting renewals of sentiment, becoming more and more a banquet of empty dishes from which the covers were never removed; then Glennard went to New York to live and exchanged the faded pleasures of intercourse for the comparative novelty of correspondence. Her letters, oddly enough,

seemed at first to bring her nearer than her presence. She had adopted, and she successfully maintained, a note as affectionately impersonal as his own; she wrote ardently of her work, she questioned him about his, she even bantered him on the inevitable pretty girl who was certain before long to divert the current of his confidences. To Glennard, who was almost a stranger in New York, the sight of Mrs. Aubyn's writing was like a voice of reassurance in surroundings as yet insufficiently aware of him. His vanity found a retrospective enjoyment in the sentiment his heart had rejected, and this factitious emotion drove him once or twice to Hillbridge, whence, after scenes of evasive tenderness, he returned dissatisfied with himself and her. As he made room for himself in New York and peopled the space he had cleared with the sympathies at the disposal of agreeable and self-confident young men, it seemed to him natural to infer that Mrs. Aubyn had refurnished in the same manner the void he was not unwilling his departure should have left. But in the dissolution of sentimental partnerships it is seldom that both associates are able to withdraw their funds at the same time; and Glennard gradually learned that he stood for the venture on which Mrs. Aubyn had irretrievably staked her all. It was not the kind of figure he cared to cut. He had no fancy for leaving havoc in his wake and would have preferred to sow a quick growth of oblivion in the spaces wasted by his unconsidered inroads; but if he supplied the seed, it was clearly Mrs. Aubyn's business to see to the raising of the crop. Her attitude seemed indeed to throw his own reasonableness into distincter relief; so that they might have stood for thrift and improvidence in an allegory of the affections.

It was not that Mrs. Aubyn permitted herself to be a pensioner on his bounty. He knew she had no wish to keep herself alive on the small change of sentiment; she simply fed on her own funded passion, and the luxuries it allowed her made him, even then, dimly aware that she had the secret of an inexhaustible alchemy.

Their relations remained thus negatively tender till she suddenly

wrote him of her decision to go abroad to live. Her father had died, she had no near ties in Hillbridge, and London offered more scope than New York to her expanding personality. She was already famous, and her laurels were yet unharvested.

For a moment the news roused Glennard to a jealous sense of lost opportunities. He wanted, at any rate, to reassert his power before she made the final effort of escape. They had not met for over a year, but of course he could not let her sail without seeing her. She came to New York the day before her departure, and they spent its last hours together. Glennard had planned no course of action—he simply meant to let himself drift. They both drifted, for a long time, down the languid current of reminiscence; she seemed to sit passive, letting him push his way back through the overgrown channels of the past. At length she reminded him that they must bring their explorations to an end. He rose to leave, and stood looking at her with the same uncertainty in his heart. He was tired of her already—he was always tired of her—yet he was not sure that he wanted her to go.

“I may never see you again,” he said, as though confidently appealing to her compassion.

Her look enveloped him. “And I shall see you always—always!”

“Why go then—?” escaped him.

“To be nearer you,” she answered; and the words dismissed him like a closing door.

The door was never to reopen; but through its narrow crack Glennard, as the years went on, became more and more conscious of an inextinguishable light directing its small ray toward the past which consumed so little of his own commemorative oil. The reproach was taken from this thought by Mrs. Aubyn’s gradual translation into terms of universality. In becoming a personage she so naturally ceased to be a person that Glennard could almost look back to his explorations of her spirit as on a visit to some famous shrine, immortalized, but in a sense desecrated, by popular veneration.

Her letters from London continued to come with the same tender punctuality; but the altered conditions of her life, the vistas of new relationships disclosed by every phrase, made her communications as impersonal as a piece of journalism. It was as though the state, the world, indeed, had taken her off his hands, assuming the maintenance of a temperament that had long exhausted his slender store of reciprocity.

In the retrospective light shed by the letters he was blinded to their specific meaning. He was not a man who concerned himself with literature, and they had been to him, at first, simply the extension of her brilliant talk, later the dreaded vehicle of a tragic importunity. He knew, of course, that they were wonderful; that, unlike the authors who give their essence to the public and keep only a dry rind for their friends, Mrs. Aubyn had stored of her rarest vintage for this hidden sacrament of tenderness. Sometimes, indeed, he had been oppressed, humiliated almost, by the multiplicity of her allusions, the wide scope of her interests, her persistence in forcing her superabundance of thought and emotion into the shallow receptacle of his sympathy; but he had never thought of the letters objectively, as the production of a distinguished woman; had never measured the literary significance of her oppressive prodigality. He was almost frightened now at the wealth in his hands; the obligation of her love had never weighed on him like this gift of her imagination: it was as though he had accepted from her something to which even a reciprocal tenderness could not have justified his claim.

He sat a long time staring at the scattered pages on his desk; and in the sudden realization of what they meant he could almost fancy some alchemistic process changing them to gold as he stared.

He had the sense of not being alone in the room, of the presence of another self observing from without the stirring of sub-conscious impulses that sent flushes of humiliation to his forehead. At length he stood up, and with the gesture of a man who wishes to give outward expression to his purpose—to establish, as it were, a moral

alibi—swept the letters into a heap and carried them toward the grate. But it would have taken too long to burn all the packets. He turned back to the table and one by one fitted the pages into their envelopes; then he tied up the letters and put them back into the locked drawer.

III

It was one of the laws of Glennard's intercourse with Miss Trent that he always went to see her the day after he had resolved to give her up. There was a special charm about the moments thus snatched from the jaws of renunciation; and his sense of their significance was on this occasion so keen that he hardly noticed the added gravity of her welcome.

His feeling for her had become so vital a part of him that her nearness had the quality of imperceptibly readjusting his point of view, of making the jumbled phenomena of experience fall at once into a rational perspective. In this redistribution of values the sombre retrospect of the previous evening shrank to a mere cloud on the edge of consciousness. Perhaps the only service an unloved woman can render the man she loves is to enhance and prolong his illusions about her rival. It was the fate of Margaret Aubyn's memory to serve as a foil to Miss Trent's presence, and never had the poor lady thrown her successor into more vivid relief.

Miss Trent had the charm of still waters that are felt to be renewed by rapid currents. Her attention spread a tranquil surface to the demonstrations of others, and it was only in days of storm that one felt the pressure of the tides. This inscrutable composure was perhaps her chief grace in Glennard's eyes. Reserve, in some natures, implies merely the locking of empty rooms or the dissimulation of awkward encumbrances; but Miss Trent's reticence was to Glennard like the closed door to the sanctuary, and his certainty of divining the hidden treasure made him content to remain outside in the happy expectancy of the neophyte.

"You didn't come to the opera last night," she began, in the tone that seemed always rather to record a fact than to offer a reflection on it.

He answered with a discouraged gesture. "What was the use? We couldn't have talked."

"Not as well as here," she assented; adding, after a meditative pause, "As you didn't come I talked to Aunt Virginia instead."

"Ah!" he returned, the fact being hardly striking enough to detach him from the contemplation of her hands, which had fallen, as was their wont, into an attitude full of plastic possibilities. One felt them to be hands that, moving only to some purpose, were capable of intervals of serene inaction.

"We had a long talk," Miss Trent went on; and she waited again before adding, with the increased absence of stress that marked her graver communications, "Aunt Virginia wants me to go abroad with her."

Glennard looked up with a start. "Abroad? When?"

"Now—next month. To be gone two years."

He permitted himself a movement of tender derision. "Does she really? Well, I want you to go abroad with *me*—for any number of years. Which offer do you accept?"

"Only one of them seems to require immediate consideration," she returned with a smile.

Glennard looked at her again. "You're not thinking of it?"

Her gaze dropped and she unclasped her hands. Her movements were so rare that they might have been said to italicize her words. "Aunt Virginia talked to me very seriously. It will be a great relief to mother and the others to have me provided for in that way for two years. I must think of that, you know." She glanced down at her gown, which, under a renovated surface, dated back to the first days of Glennard's wooing. "I try not to cost much—but I do."

"Good Lord!" Glennard groaned.

They sat silent till at length she gently took up the argument. "As

the eldest, you know, I'm bound to consider these things. Women are such a burden. Jim does what he can for mother, but with his own children to provide for it isn't very much. You see we're all poor together."

"Your aunt isn't. She might help your mother."

"She does—in her own way."

"Exactly—that's the rich relation all over! You may be miserable in any way you like, but if you're to be happy you must be so in her way—and in her old gowns."

"I could be very happy in Aunt Virginia's old gowns," Miss Trent interposed.

"Abroad, you mean?"

"I mean wherever I felt that I was helping. And my going abroad will help."

"Of course—I see that. And I see your considerateness in putting its advantages negatively."

"Negatively?"

"In dwelling simply on what the going will take you from, not on what it will bring you to. It means a lot to a woman, of course, to get away from a life like this." He summed up in a disparaging glance the background of indigent furniture. "The question is how you'll like coming back to it."

She seemed to accept the full consequences of his thought. "I only know I don't like leaving it."

He flung back sombrely, "You don't even put it conditionally then?"

Her gaze deepened. "On what?"

He stood up and walked across the room. Then he came back and paused before her. "On the alternative of marrying me."

The slow color—even her blushes seemed deliberate—rose to her lower lids; her lips stirred, but the words resolved themselves into a smile and she waited.

He took another turn, with the thwarted step of the man whose

nervous exasperation escapes through his muscles.

“And to think that in fifteen years I shall have a big practice!”

Her eyes triumphed for him. “In less!”

“The cursed irony of it! What do I care for the man I shall be then? It’s slaving one’s life away for a stranger!” He took her hands abruptly. “You’ll go to Cannes, I suppose, or Monte Carlo? I heard Hollingsworth say to-day that he meant to take his yacht over to the Mediterranean—”

She released herself. “If you think that—”

“I don’t. I almost wish I did. It would be easier, I mean.” He broke off incoherently. “I believe your Aunt Virginia does, though. She somehow connotes Hollingsworth and the Mediterranean.” He caught her hands again. “Alexa—if we could manage a little hole somewhere out of town?”

“Could we?” she sighed, half yielding.

“In one of those places where they make jokes about the mosquitoes,” he pressed her. “Could you get on with one servant?”

“Could you get on without varnished boots?”

“Promise me you won’t go, then!”

“What are you thinking of, Stephen?”

“I don’t know,” he stammered, the question giving unexpected form to his intention. “It’s all in the air yet, of course; but I picked up a tip the other day—”

“You’re not speculating?” she cried, with a kind of superstitious terror.

“Lord, no. This is a sure thing—I almost wish it wasn’t; I mean if I can work it—” He had a sudden vision of the comprehensiveness of the temptation. If only he had been less sure of Dinslow! His assurance gave the situation the base element of safety.

“I don’t understand you,” she faltered.

“Trust me, instead!” he adjured her with sudden energy; and turning on her abruptly, “If you go, you know, you go free,” he concluded.

She drew back, paling a little. "Why do you make it harder for me?"

"To make it easier for myself," he retorted.

IV

The next afternoon Glennard, leaving his office earlier than usual, turned, on his way home, into one of the public libraries.

He had the place to himself at that closing hour, and the librarian was able to give an undivided attention to his tentative request for letters—collections of letters. The librarian suggested Walpole.

"I meant women—women's letters."

The librarian proffered Hannah More and Miss Martineau.

Glennard cursed his own inarticulateness. "I mean letters to—to some one person—a man; their husband—or—"

"Ah," said the inspired librarian, "Eloise and Abailard."

"Well—something a little nearer, perhaps," said Glennard, with lightness. "Didn't Mérimée—"

"The lady's letters, in that case, were not published."

"Of course not," said Glennard, vexed at his blunder.

"There are George Sand's letters to Flaubert."

"Ah!" Glennard hesitated. "Was she—were they—?" He chafed at his own ignorance of the sentimental by-paths of literature.

"If you want love-letters, perhaps some of the French eighteenth-century correspondences might suit you better— Mlle. Aïssé or Madame de Sabran—"

But Glennard insisted. "I want something modern— English or American. I want to look something up," he lamely concluded.

The librarian could only suggest George Eliot.

"Well, give me some of the French things, then—and I'll have Mérimée's letters. It was the woman who published them, wasn't it?"

He caught up his armful, transferring it, on the doorstep, to a cab which carried him to his rooms. He dined alone, hurriedly, at a small restaurant near by, and returned at once to his books.

Late that night, as he undressed, he wondered what contemptible impulse had forced from him his last words to Alexa Trent. It was bad enough to interfere with the girl's chances by hanging about her to the obvious exclusion of other men, but it was worse to seem to justify his weakness by dressing up the future in delusive ambiguities. He saw himself sinking from depth to depth of sentimental cowardice in his reluctance to renounce his hold on her; and it filled him with self-disgust to think that the highest feeling of which he supposed himself capable was blent with such base elements.

His awakening was hardly cheered by the sight of her writing. He tore her note open and took in the few lines—she seldom exceeded the first page—with the lucidity of apprehension that is the forerunner of evil.

“My aunt sails on Saturday and I must give her my answer the day after to-morrow. Please don't come till then—I want to think the question over by myself. I know I ought to go. Won't you help me to be reasonable?”

It was settled, then. Well, he would help her to be reasonable; he wouldn't stand in her way; he would let her go. For two years he had been living some other, luckier man's life; the time had come when he must drop back into his own. He no longer tried to look ahead, to grope his way through the endless labyrinth of his material difficulties; a sense of dull resignation closed in on him like a fog.

“Hullo, Glennard!” a voice said, as an electric car, late that afternoon, dropped him at an uptown corner.

He looked up and met the interrogative smile of Barton Flamel, who stood on the curbstone watching the retreating car with the eye of a man philosophic enough to remember that it will be followed by another.

Glennard felt his usual impulse of pleasure at meeting Flamel; but it was not in this case curtailed by the reaction of contempt that

habitually succeeded it. Probably even the few men who had known Flamel since his youth could have given no good reason for the vague mistrust that he inspired. Some people are judged by their actions, others by their ideas; and perhaps the shortest way of defining Flamel is to say that his well-known leniency of view was vaguely divined to include himself. Simple minds may have resented the discovery that his opinions were based on his perceptions; but there was certainly no more definite charge against him than that implied in the doubt as to how he would behave in an emergency, and his company was looked upon as one of those mildly unwholesome dissipations to which the prudent may occasionally yield. It now offered itself to Glennard as an easy escape from the obsession of moral problems, which somehow could no more be worn in Flamel's presence than a surplice in the street.

"Where are you going? To the club?" Flamel asked; adding, as the younger man assented, "Why not come to my studio instead? You'll see one bore instead of twenty."

The apartment which Flamel described as his studio showed, as its one claim to the designation, a perennially empty easel, the rest of its space being filled with the evidences of a comprehensive dilettanteism. Against this background, which seemed the visible expression of its owner's intellectual tolerance, rows of fine books detached themselves with a prominence showing them to be Flamel's chief care.

Glennard glanced with the eye of untrained curiosity at the lines of warm-toned morocco, while his host busied himself with the uncorking of Apollinaris.

"You've got a splendid lot of books," he said.

"They're fairly decent," the other assented, in the curt tone of the collector who will not talk of his passion for fear of talking of nothing else; then, as Glennard, his hands in his pockets, began to stroll perfunctorily down the long line of bookcases— "Some men," Flamel irresistibly added, "think of books merely as tools, others as

tooling. I'm between the two; there are days when I use them as scenery, other days when I want them as society; so that, as you see, my library represents a makeshift compromise between looks and brains, and the collectors look down on me almost as much as the students."

Glennard, without answering, was mechanically taking one book after another from the shelves. His hands slipped curiously over the smooth covers and the noiseless subsidence of opening pages. Suddenly he came on a thin volume of faded manuscript.

"What's this?" he asked with a listless sense of wonder.

"Ah, you're at my manuscript shelf. I've been going in for that sort of thing lately." Flamel came up and looked over his shoulders. "That's a bit of Stendhal—one of the Italian stories—and here are some letters of Balzac to Madame Surville."

Glennard took the book with sudden eagerness. "Who was Madame Surville?"

"His sister." He was conscious that Flamel was looking at him with the smile that was like an interrogation point. "I didn't know you cared for this kind of thing."

"I don't—at least I've never had the chance. Have you many collections of letters?"

"Lord, no—very few. I'm just beginning, and most of the interesting ones are out of my reach. Here's a queer little collection, though—the rarest thing I've got—half a dozen of Shelley's letters to Harriet Westbrook. I had a devil of a time getting them—a lot of collectors were after them."

Glennard, taking the volume from his hand, glanced with a kind of repugnance at the interleaving of yellow crisscrossed sheets. "She was the one who drowned herself, wasn't she?"

Flamel nodded. "I suppose that little episode adds about fifty per cent. to their value," he said meditatively.

Glennard laid the book down. He wondered why he had joined Flamel. He was in no humor to be amused by the older man's talk,

and a recrudescence of personal misery rose about him like an icy tide.

"I believe I must take myself off," he said. "I'd forgotten an engagement."

He turned to go; but almost at the same moment he was conscious of a duality of intention wherein his apparent wish to leave revealed itself as a last effort of the will against the overmastering desire to stay and unbosom himself to Flamel.

The older man, as though divining the conflict, laid a detaining pressure on his arm.

"Won't the engagement keep? Sit down and try one of these cigars. I don't often have the luck of seeing you here."

"I'm rather driven just now," said Glennard vaguely. He found himself seated again, and Flamel had pushed to his side a low stand holding a bottle of Apollinaris and a decanter of cognac.

Flamel, thrown back in his capacious arm-chair, surveyed him through a cloud of smoke with the comfortable tolerance of the man to whom no inconsistencies need be explained. Connivance was implicit in the air. It was the kind of atmosphere in which the outrageous loses its edge. Glennard felt a gradual relaxing of his nerves.

"I suppose one has to pay a lot for letters like that?" he heard himself asking, with a glance in the direction of the volume he had laid aside.

"Oh, so-so—depends on circumstances." Flamel viewed him thoughtfully. "Are you thinking of collecting?"

Glennard laughed. "Lord, no. The other way round."

"Selling?"

"Oh, I hardly know. I was thinking of a poor chap—"

Flamel filled the pause with a nod of interest.

"A poor chap I used to know—who died—he died last year—and who left me a lot of letters, letters he thought a great deal of—he was fond of me and left 'em to me outright, with the idea, I suppose, that

they might benefit me somehow—I don't know—I'm not much up on such things—" He reached his hand to the tall glass his host had filled.

"A collection of autograph letters, eh? Any big names?"

"Oh, only one name. They're all letters written to him—by one person, you understand; a woman, in fact—"

"Oh, a woman," said Flamel negligently.

Glennard was nettled by his obvious loss of interest. "I rather think they'd attract a good deal of notice if they were published."

Flamel still looked uninterested. "Love-letters, I suppose?" "Oh, just—the letters a woman would write to a man she knew well. They were tremendous friends, he and she."

"And she wrote a clever letter?"

"Clever? It was Margaret Aubyn."

A great silence filled the room. It seemed to Glennard that the words had burst from him as blood gushes from a wound.

"Great Scott!" said Flamel sitting up. "A collection of Margaret Aubyn's letters? Did you say *you* had them?"

"They were left me—by my friend."

"I see. Was he—well, no matter. You're to be congratulated, at any rate. What are you going to do with them?"

Glennard stood up with a sense of weariness in all his bones. "Oh, I don't know. I haven't thought much about it. I just happened to see that some fellow was writing her life—"

"Joslin; yes. You didn't think of giving them to him?"

Glennard had lounged across the room and stood staring up at a bronze Bacchus who drooped his garlanded head above the pediment of an Italian cabinet. "What ought I to do? You're just the fellow to advise me." He felt the blood in his cheek as he spoke.

Flamel sat with meditative eye. "What do you *want* to do with them?" he asked.

"I want to publish them," said Glennard, swinging round with sudden energy—"If I can—"

"If you can? They're yours, you say?"

"They're mine fast enough. There's no one to prevent—I mean there are no restrictions—" he was arrested by the sense that these accumulated proofs of impunity might precisely stand as the strongest check on his action.

"And Mrs. Aubyn had no family, I believe?"

"No."

"Then I don't see who's to interfere," said Flamel, studying his cigar-tip.

Glennard had turned his unseeing stare on an ecstatic Saint Catherine framed in tarnished gilding.

"It's just this way," he began again, with an effort. "When letters are as personal as—as these of my friend's. . . . Well, I don't mind telling you that the cash would make a heap of difference to me; such a lot that it rather obscures my judgment—the fact is, if I could lay my hand on a few thousands now I could get into a big thing, and without appreciable risk; and I'd like to know whether you think I'd be justified—under the circumstances. . . ." He paused with a dry throat. It seemed to him at the moment that it would be impossible for him ever to sink lower in his own estimation. He was in truth less ashamed of weighing the temptation than of submitting his scruples to a man like Flamel, and affecting to appeal to sentiments of delicacy on the absence of which he had consciously reckoned. But he had reached a point where each word seemed to compel another, as each wave in a stream is forced forward by the pressure behind it; and before Flamel could speak he had faltered out—"You don't think people could say . . . could criticise the man. . . ."

"But the man's dead, isn't he?"

"He's dead—yes; but can I assume the responsibility without—"

Flamel hesitated; and almost immediately Glennard's scruples gave way to irritation. If at this hour Flamel were to affect an inopportune reluctance—!

The older man's answer reassured him. "Why need you assume any

responsibility? Your name won't appear, of course; and as to your friend's, I don't see why his should either. He wasn't a celebrity himself, I suppose?"

"No, no."

"Then the letters can be addressed to Mr. Blank. Doesn't that make it all right?"

Glennard's hesitation revived. "For the public, yes. But I don't see that it alters the case for me. The question is, ought I to publish them at all?"

"Of course you ought to." Flamel spoke with invigorating emphasis. "I doubt if you'd be justified in keeping them back. Anything of Margaret Aubyn's is more or less public property by this time. She's too great for any one of us. I was only wondering how you could use them to the best advantage—to yourself, I mean. How many are there?"

"Oh, a lot; perhaps a hundred—I haven't counted. There may be more. . . ."

"Gad! What a haul! When were they written?"

"I don't know—that is—they corresponded for years. What's the odds?" He moved toward his hat with a vague impulse of flight.

"It all counts," said Flamel imperturbably. "A long correspondence—one, I mean, that covers a great deal of time—is obviously worth more than if the same number of letters had been written within a year. At any rate, you won't give them to Joslin? They'd fill a book, wouldn't they?"

"I suppose so. I don't know how much it takes to fill a book."

"Not love-letters, you say?"

"Why?" flashed from Glennard.

"Oh, nothing—only the big public is sentimental, and if they *were*—why, you could get any money for Margaret Aubyn's love-letters."

Glennard was silent.

"Are the letters interesting in themselves? I mean apart from the association with her name?"

"I'm no judge." Glennard took up his hat and thrust himself into his overcoat. "I dare say I sha'n't do anything about it. And, Flamel—you won't mention this to any one?"

"Lord, no. Well, I congratulate you. You've got a big thing." Flamel was smiling at him from the hearth.

Glennard, on the threshold, forced a response to the smile, while he questioned with loitering indifference—"Financially, eh?"

"Rather; I should say so."

Glennard's hand lingered on the knob. "How much—should you say? You know about such things."

"Oh, I should have to see the letters; but I should say—well, if you've got enough to fill a book and they're fairly readable, and the book is brought out at the right time—say ten thousand down from the publisher, and possibly one or two more in royalties. If you got the publishers bidding against each other you might do even better; but of course I'm talking in the dark."

"Of course," said Glennard, with sudden dizziness. His hand had slipped from the knob and he stood staring down at the exotic spirals of the Persian rug beneath his feet.

"I'd have to see the letters," Flamel repeated.

"Of course—you'd have to see them. . . ." Glennard stammered; and, without turning, he flung over his shoulder an inarticulate "Good-bye. . . ."

V

The little house, as Glennard strolled up to it between the trees, seemed no more than a gay tent pitched against the sunshine. It had the crispness of a freshly starched summer gown, and the geraniums on the veranda bloomed as simultaneously as the flowers in a bonnet. The garden was prospering absurdly. Seed they had sown at random—amid laughing counter-charges of incompetence—had shot up in fragrant defiance of their blunders. He smiled to see the clematis unfolding its punctual wings about the porch. The tiny lawn

was smooth as a shaven cheek, and a crimson Rambler mounted to the nursery window of a baby who never cried. A breeze shook the awning above the tea-table, and his wife, as he drew near, could be seen bending above a kettle that was just about to boil. So vividly did the whole scene suggest the painted bliss of a stage setting, that it would have been hardly surprising to see her step forward among the flowers and trill out her virtuous happiness from the veranda rail.

The stale heat of the long day in town, the dusty promiscuity of the suburban train, were now but the requisite foil to an evening of scented breezes and tranquil talk. They had been married more than a year, and each home-coming still reflected the freshness of their first day together. If, indeed, their happiness had a flaw, it was in resembling too closely the bright impermanence of their surroundings. Their love as yet was but the gay tent of holiday-makers.

His wife looked up with a smile. The country life suited her, and her beauty had gained depth from a stillness in which certain faces might have grown opaque.

"Are you very tired?" she asked, pouring his tea.

"Just enough to enjoy this." He rose from the chair in which he had thrown himself and bent over the tray for his cream. "You've had a visitor?" he commented, noticing a half-empty cup beside her own.

"Only Mr. Flamel," she said indifferently.

"Flamel? Again?"

She answered without show of surprise. "He left just now. His yacht is down at Laurel Bay and he borrowed a trap of the Dreshams to drive over here."

Glennard made no comment, and she went on, leaning her head back against the cushions of her bamboo seat, "He wants us to go for a sail with him next Sunday."

Glennard meditatively stirred his tea. He was trying to think of the most natural and unartificial thing to say, and his voice seemed to

come from the outside, as though he were speaking behind a marionette. "Do you want to?"

"Just as you please," she said compliantly. No affectation of indifference could have been as baffling as her compliance. Glennard, of late, was beginning to feel that the surface which, a year ago, he had taken for a sheet of clear glass, might, after all, be a mirror reflecting merely his own conception of what lay behind it.

"Do you like Flamel?" he suddenly asked; to which, still engaged with her tea, she returned the feminine answer—"I thought you did."

"I do, of course," he agreed, vexed at his own incorrigible tendency to magnify Flamel's importance by hovering about the topic. "A sail would be rather jolly; let's go."

She made no reply and he drew forth the rolled-up evening papers which he had thrust into his pocket on leaving the train. As he smoothed them out his own countenance seemed to undergo the same process. He ran his eye down the list of stocks, and Flamel's importunate personality receded behind the rows of figures pushing forward into notice like so many bearers of good news. Glennard's investments were flowering like his garden: the driest shares blossomed into dividends and a golden harvest awaited his sickle.

He glanced at his wife with the tranquil air of a man who digests good luck as naturally as the dry ground absorbs a shower. "Things are looking uncommonly well. I believe we shall be able to go to town for two or three months next winter if we can find something cheap."

She smiled luxuriously: it was pleasant to be able to say, with an air of balancing relative advantages, "Really, on the baby's account I shall be almost sorry; but if we do go, there's Kate Erskine's house . . . she'll let us have it for almost nothing. . . ."

"Well, write her about it," he recommended, his eye travelling on in search of the weather report. He had turned to the wrong page; and suddenly a line of black characters leapt out at him as from an ambush.

“MARGARET AUBYN’S LETTERS.

“Two volumes. Out To-day. First Edition of five thousand sold out before leaving the press. Second Edition ready next week. The Book of the Year. . . .”

He looked up stupidly. His wife still sat with her head thrown back, her pure profile detached against the cushions. She was smiling a little over the prospect his last words had opened. Behind her head shivers of sun and shade ran across the striped awning. A row of maples and a privet hedge hid their neighbor’s gables, giving them undivided possession of their leafy half-acre; and life, a moment before, had been like their plot of ground, shut off, hedged in from importunities, impenetrably his and hers. Now it seemed to him that every maple-leaf, every privet-bud, was a relentless human gaze, pressing close upon their privacy. It was as though they sat in a brightly lit room, uncurtained from a darkness full of hostile watchers. . . . His wife still smiled; and her unconsciousness of danger seemed in some horrible way to put her beyond the reach of rescue. . . .

He had not known that it would be like this. After the first odious weeks, spent in preparing the letters for publication, in submitting them to Flamel, and in negotiating with the publishers, the transaction had dropped out of his consciousness into that unvisited limbo to which we relegate the deeds we would rather not have done but have no notion of undoing. From the moment he had obtained Miss Trent’s promise not to sail with her aunt he had tried to imagine himself irrevocably committed. After that, he argued, his first duty was to her—she had become his conscience. The sum obtained from the publishers by Flamel’s adroit manipulations, and opportunely transferred to Dinslow’s successful venture, already yielded a return which, combined with Glennard’s professional earnings, took the edge of compulsion from their way of living, making it appear the expression of a graceful preference for simplicity. It was the mitigated poverty which can subscribe to a review or two and have a

few flowers on the dinner-table. And already in a small way Glennard was beginning to feel the magnetic quality of prosperity. Clients who had passed his door in the hungry days sought it out now that it bore the name of a successful man. It was understood that a small inheritance, cleverly invested, was the source of his fortune; and there was a feeling that a man who could do so well for himself was likely to know how to turn over other people's money.

But it was in the more intimate reward of his wife's happiness that Glennard tasted the full flavor of success. Coming out of conditions so narrow that those he offered her seemed spacious, she fitted into her new life without any of those manifest efforts at adjustment that are as sore to a husband's pride as the critical rearrangement of the bridal furniture. She had given him, instead, the delicate pleasure of watching her expand like a sea-creature restored to its element, stretching out the atrophied tentacles of girlish vanity and enjoyment to the rising tide of opportunity. And somehow—in the windowless inner cell of his consciousness where self-criticism cowered—Glennard's course seemed justified by its merely material success. How could such a crop of innocent blessedness have sprung from tainted soil? . . .

Now he had the injured sense of a man entrapped into a disadvantageous bargain. He had not known it would be like this; and a dull anger gathered at his heart. Anger against whom? Against his wife, for not knowing what he suffered? Against Flamel, for being the unconscious instrument of his wrongdoing? Or against that mute memory to which his own act had suddenly given a voice of accusation? Yes, that was it; and his punishment henceforth would be the presence, the unescapable presence, of the woman he had so persistently evaded. She would always be there now. It was as though he had married her instead of the other. It was what she had always wanted—to be with him—and she had gained her point at last. . . .

He sprang up, as though in an impulse of flight. . . . The sudden

movement lifted his wife's lids, and she asked, in the incurious voice of the woman whose life is enclosed in a magic circle of prosperity—"Any news?"

"No—none—" he said, roused to a sense of immediate peril. The papers lay scattered at his feet—what if she were to see them? He stretched his arm to gather them up, but his next thought showed him the futility of such concealment. The same advertisement would appear every day, for weeks to come, in every newspaper; how could he prevent her seeing it? He could not always be hiding the papers from her. . . . Well, and what if she did see it? It would signify nothing to her; the chances were that she would never even read the book. . . . As she ceased to be an element of fear in his calculations the distance between them seemed to lessen and he took her again, as it were, into the circle of his conjugal protection. . . . Yet a moment before he had almost hated her! . . . He laughed aloud at his senseless terrors. . . . He was off his balance, decidedly. . . .

"What are you laughing at?" she asked.

He explained, elaborately, that he was laughing at the recollection of an old woman in the train, an old woman with a lot of bundles, who couldn't find her ticket. . . . But somehow, in the telling, the humor of the story seemed to evaporate, and he felt the conventionality of her smile. He glanced at his watch. "Isn't it time to dress?"

She rose with serene reluctance. "It's a pity to go in. The garden looks so lovely."

They lingered side by side, surveying their domain. There was not space in it, at this hour, for the shadow of the elm tree in the angle of the hedge: it crossed the lawn, cut the flower-border in two, and ran up the side of the house to the nursery window. She bent to flick a caterpillar from the honeysuckle; then, as they turned indoors, "If we mean to go on the yacht next Sunday," she suggested, "oughtn't you to let Mr. Flamel know?"

Glennard's exasperation deflected suddenly. "Of course I shall let

him know. You always seem to imply that I'm going to do something rude to Flamel."

The words reverberated through her silence; she had a way of thus leaving one space in which to contemplate one's folly at arm's length. Glennard turned on his heel and went upstairs. As he dropped into a chair before his dressing-table, he said to himself that in the last hour he had sounded the depths of his humiliation, and that the lowest dregs of it, the very bottom-slime, was the hateful necessity of having always, as long as the two men lived, to be civil to Barton Flamel.

VI

The week in town had been sultry, and the men, in the Sunday emancipation of white flannel and duck, filled the deck chairs of the yacht with their outstretched apathy, following, through a mist of cigarette smoke, the flitting inconsequences of the women. The party was a small one—Flamel had few intimate friends—but composed of more heterogeneous atoms than the little pools into which society usually runs. The reaction from the chief episode of his earlier life had bred in Glennard an uneasy distaste for any kind of personal saliency. Cleverness was useful in business; but in society it seemed to him as futile as the sham cascades formed by a stream that might have been used to drive a mill. He liked the collective point of view that goes with the civilized uniformity of dress clothes, and his wife's attitude implied the same preference; yet they found themselves slipping more and more into Flamel's intimacy. Alexa had once or twice said that she enjoyed meeting clever people; but her enjoyment took the negative form of a smiling receptivity; and Glennard felt a growing preference for the kind of people who have their thinking done for them by the community.

Still, the deck of the yacht was a pleasant refuge from the heat on shore, and his wife's profile, serenely projected against the changing blue, lay on his retina like a cool hand on the nerves. He had never

been more impressed by the kind of absoluteness that lifted her beauty above the transient effects of other women, making the most harmonious face seem an accidental collocation of features.

The ladies who directly suggested this comparison were of a kind accustomed to take similar risks with more gratifying results. Mrs. Armiger had in fact long been the triumphant alternative of those who couldn't "see" Alexa Glennard's looks; and Mrs. Touchett's claims to consideration were founded on that distribution of effects which is the wonder of those who admire a highly cultivated country. The third lady of the trio which Glennard's fancy had put to such unflattering uses was bound by circumstances to support the claims of the other two. This was Mrs. Dresham, the wife of the editor of the *Radiator*. Mrs. Dresham was a lady who had rescued herself from social obscurity by assuming the rôle of her husband's exponent and interpreter; and Dresham's leisure being devoted to the cultivation of remarkable women, his wife's attitude committed her to the public celebration of their remarkableness. For the conceivable tedium of this duty, Mrs. Dresham was repaid by the fact that there were people who took *her* for a remarkable woman; and who in turn probably purchased similar distinction with the small change of her reflected importance. As to the other ladies of the party, they were simply the wives of some of the men—the kind of women who expect to be talked to collectively and to have their questions left unanswered.

Mrs. Armiger, the latest embodiment of Dresham's instinct for the remarkable, was an innocent beauty who for years had distilled dulness among a set of people now self-condemned by their inability to appreciate her. Under Dresham's tutelage she had developed into a "thoughtful woman," who read his leaders in the *Radiator* and bought the works he recommended. When a new book appeared, people wanted to know what Mrs. Armiger thought of it; and a young gentleman who had made a trip in Touraine had recently inscribed to her the wide-margined result of his explorations.

Glennard, leaning back with his head against the rail and a slit of fugitive blue between his half-closed lids, vaguely wished she wouldn't spoil the afternoon by making people talk; though he reduced his annoyance to the minimum by not listening to what was said, there remained a latent irritation against the general futility of words.

His wife's gift of silence seemed to him the most vivid commentary on the clumsiness of speech as a means of intercourse, and his eyes had turned to her in renewed appreciation of this finer faculty when Mrs. Armiger's voice abruptly brought home to him the underrated potentialities of language.

"You've read them, of course, Mrs. Glennard?" he heard her ask; and, in reply to Alexa's vague interrogation—"Why, the *Aubyn Letters*—it's the only book people are talking of this week."

Mrs. Dresham immediately saw her advantage. "You *haven't* read them? How very extraordinary! As Mrs. Armiger says, the book's in the air: one breathes it in like the influenza."

Glennard sat motionless, watching his wife.

"Perhaps it hasn't reached the suburbs yet," she said with her unruffled smile.

"Oh, *do* let me come to you, then!" Mrs. Touchett cried; "anything for a change of air! I'm positively sick of the book and I can't put it down. Can't you sail us beyond its reach, Mr. Flamel?"

Flamel shook his head. "Not even with this breeze. Literature travels faster than steam nowadays. And the worst of it is that we can't any of us give up reading: it's as insidious as a vice and as tiresome as a virtue."

"I believe it *is* a vice, almost, to read such a book as the *Letters*," said Mrs. Touchett. "It's the woman's soul, absolutely torn up by the roots—her whole self laid bare; and to a man who evidently didn't care; who couldn't have cared. I don't mean to read another line: it's too much like listening at a keyhole."

"But if she wanted it published?"

"Wanted it? How do we know she did?"

"Why, I heard she'd left the letters to the man—whoever he is—with directions that they should be published after his death—"

"I don't believe it," Mrs. Touchett declared.

"He's dead then, is he?" one of the men asked.

"Why, you don't suppose if he were alive he could ever hold up his head again, with these letters being read by everybody?" Mrs. Touchett protested. "It must have been horrible enough to know they'd been written to him; but to publish them! No man could have done it and no woman could have told him to—"

"Oh, come, come," Dresham judicially interposed; "after all, they're not love-letters."

"No—that's the worst of it; they're unloved letters," Mrs. Touchett retorted.

"Then, obviously, she needn't have written them; whereas the man, poor devil, could hardly help receiving them."

"Perhaps he counted on the public to save him the trouble of reading them," said young Hartly, who was in the cynical stage.

Mrs. Armiger turned her reproachful loveliness to Dresham. "From the way you defend him I believe you know who he is."

Every one looked at Dresham, and his wife smiled with the superior air of the woman who is in her husband's professional secrets. Dresham shrugged his shoulders.

"What have I said to defend him?"

"You called him a poor devil—you pitied him."

"A man who could let Margaret Aubyn write to him in that way? Of course I pity him."

"Then you *must* know who he is," cried Mrs. Armiger with a triumphant air of penetration.

Hartly and Flamel laughed and Dresham shook his head. "No one knows; not even the publishers; so they tell me at least."

"So they tell you to tell us," Hartly astutely amended; and Mrs. Armiger added, with the appearance of carrying the argument a

point farther, “But even if *he’s* dead and *she’s* dead, somebody must have given the letters to the publishers.”

“A little bird, probably,” said Dresham, smiling indulgently on her deduction.

“A little bird of prey then—a vulture, I should say—” another man interpolated.

“Oh, I’m not with you there,” said Dresham easily. “Those letters belonged to the public.”

“How can any letters belong to the public that weren’t written to the public?” Mrs. Touchett interposed.

“Well, these were, in a sense. A personality as big as Margaret Aubyn’s belongs to the world. Such a mind is part of the general fund of thought. It’s the penalty of greatness—one becomes a *monument historique*. Posterity pays the cost of keeping one up, but on condition that one is always open to the public.”

“I don’t see that that exonerates the man who gives up the keys of the sanctuary, as it were.”

“Who *was* he?” another voice inquired.

“Who was he? Oh, nobody, I fancy—the letter-box, the slit in the wall through which the letters passed to posterity. . . .”

“But she never meant them for posterity!”

“A woman shouldn’t write such letters if she doesn’t mean them to be published. . . .”

“She shouldn’t write them to such a man!” Mrs. Touchett scornfully corrected.

“I never keep letters,” said Mrs. Armiger, under the obvious impression that she was contributing a valuable point to the discussion.

There was a general laugh, and Flamel, who had not spoken, said lazily, “You women are too incurably subjective. I venture to say that most men would see in those letters merely their immense literary value, their significance as documents. The personal side doesn’t count where there’s so much else.”

"Oh, we all know you haven't any principles," Mrs. Armiger declared; and Alexa Glennard, lifting an indolent smile, said: "I shall never write you a love-letter, Mr. Flamel."

Glennard moved away impatiently. Such talk was as tedious as the buzzing of gnats. He wondered why his wife had wanted to drag him on such a senseless expedition. . . . He hated Flamel's crowd—and what business had Flamel himself to interfere in that way, standing up for the publication of the letters as though Glennard needed his defence? . . .

Glennard turned his head and saw that Flamel had drawn a seat to Alexa's elbow and was speaking to her in a low tone. The other groups had scattered, straying in twos along the deck. It came over Glennard that he should never again be able to see Flamel speaking to his wife without the sense of sick mistrust that now loosened his joints. . . .

Alexa, the next morning, over their early breakfast, surprised her husband by an unexpected request.

"Will you bring me those letters from town?" she asked. "What letters?" he said, putting down his cup. He felt himself as vulnerable as a man who is lunged at in the dark.

"Mrs. Aubyn's. The book they were all talking about yesterday."

Glennard, carefully measuring his second cup of tea, said with deliberation, "I didn't know you cared about that sort of thing."

She was, in fact, not a great reader, and a new book seldom reached her till it was, so to speak, on the home stretch; but she replied with a gentle tenacity, "I think it would interest me because I read her life last year."

"Her life? Where did you get that?"

"Some one lent it to me when it came out—Mr. Flamel, I think."

His first impulse was to exclaim, "Why the devil do you borrow books of Flamel? I can buy you all you want—" but he felt himself irresistibly forced into an attitude of smiling compliance. "Flamel always has the newest books going, hasn't he? You must be careful,

by the way, about returning what he lends you. He's rather crotchety about his library."

"Oh, I'm always very careful," she said, with a touch of competence that struck him; and she added, as he caught up his hat: "Don't forget the letters."

Why had she asked for the book? Was her sudden wish to see it the result of some hint of Flamel's? The thought turned Glennard sick, but he preserved sufficient lucidity to tell himself, a moment later, that his last hope of self-control would be lost if he yielded to the temptation of seeing a hidden purpose in everything she said and did. How much Flamel guessed, he had no means of divining; nor could he predicate, from what he knew of the man, to what use his inferences might be put. The very qualities that had made Flamel a useful adviser made him the most dangerous of accomplices. Glennard felt himself agroped among alien forces that his own act had set in motion. . . .

Alexa was a woman of few requirements; but her wishes, even in trifles, had a definiteness that distinguished them from the fluid impulses of her kind. He knew that, having once asked for the book, she would not forget it; and he put aside, as an ineffectual expedient, his momentary idea of applying for it at the circulating library and telling her that all the copies were out. If the book was to be bought, it had better be bought at once. He left his office earlier than usual and turned in at the first bookshop on his way to the train. The show-window was stacked with conspicuously lettered volumes. *Margaret Aubyn* flashed back at him in endless iteration. He plunged into the shop and came on a counter where the name repeated itself on row after row of bindings. It seemed to have driven the rest of literature to the back shelves. He caught up a copy, tossing the money to an astonished clerk, who pursued him to the door with the unheeded offer to wrap up the volumes.

In the street he was seized with a sudden apprehension. What if he were to meet Flamel? The thought was intolerable. He called a cab

and drove straight to the station, where, amid the palm-leaf fans of a perspiring crowd, he waited a long half-hour for his train to start.

He had thrust a volume in either pocket, and in the train he dared not draw them out; but the detested words leaped at him from the folds of the evening paper. The air seemed full of Margaret Aubyn's name; the motion of the train set it dancing up and down on the page of a magazine that a man in front of him was reading. . . .

At the door he was told that Mrs. Glennard was still out, and he went upstairs to his room and dragged the books from his pocket. They lay on the table before him like live things that he feared to touch. . . . At length he opened the first volume. A familiar letter sprang out at him, each word quickened by its glaring garb of type. The little broken phrases fled across the page like wounded animals in the open. . . . It was a horrible sight . . . a *battue* of helpless things driven savagely out of shelter. He had not known it would be like this. . . .

He understood now that, at the moment of selling the letters, he had viewed the transaction solely as it affected himself: as an unfortunate blemish on an otherwise presentable record. He had scarcely considered the act in relation to Margaret Aubyn; for death, if it hallows, also makes innocuous. Glennard's God was a god of the living, of the immediate, the actual, the tangible; all his days he had lived in the presence of that god, heedless of the divinities who, below the surface of our deeds and passions, silently forge the fatal weapons of the dead.

VII

A knock roused him, and looking up he saw his wife. He met her glance in silence, and she faltered out, "Are you ill?"

The words restored his self-possession. "Ill? Of course not. They told me you were out and I came upstairs."

The books lay between them on the table; he wondered when she would see them. She lingered tentatively on the threshold, with the

air of leaving his explanation on his hands. She was not the kind of woman who could be counted on to fortify an excuse by appearing to dispute it.

"Where have you been?" Glennard asked, moving forward so that he obstructed her vision of the books.

"I walked over to the Dreshams' for tea."

"I can't think what you see in those people," he said with a shrug; adding, uncontrollably—"I suppose Flamel was there?"

"No; he left on the yacht this morning."

An answer so obstructing to the natural escape of his irritation left Glennard with no momentary resource but that of strolling impatiently to the window. As her eyes followed him they lit on the books.

"Ah, you've brought them! I'm so glad," she said.

He answered over his shoulder, "For a woman who never reads you make the most astounding exceptions!"

Her smile was an exasperating concession to the probability that it had been hot in town or that something had bothered him.

"Do you mean it's not nice to want to read the book?" she asked. "It was not nice to publish it, certainly; but after all, I'm not responsible for that, am I?" She paused, and, as he made no answer, went on, still smiling, "I do read sometimes, you know; and I'm very fond of Margaret Aubyn's books. I was reading *Pomegranate Seed* when we first met. Don't you remember? It was then you told me all about her."

Glennard had turned back into the room and stood staring at his wife. "All about her?" he repeated, and with the words remembrance came to him. He had found Miss Trent one afternoon with the novel in her hand, and moved by the lover's fatuous impulse to associate himself in some way with whatever fills the mind of the beloved, had broken through his habitual silence about the past. Rewarded by the consciousness of figuring impressively in Miss Trent's imagination, he had gone on from one anecdote to another, reviving dormant

details of his old Hillbridge life, and pasturing his vanity on the eagerness with which she listened to his reminiscences of a being already clothed in the impersonality of greatness.

The incident had left no trace in his mind; but it sprang up now like an old enemy, the more dangerous for having been forgotten. The instinct of self-preservation—sometimes the most perilous that man can exercise—made him awkwardly declare: “Oh, I used to see her at people’s houses, that was all;” and her silence as usual leaving room for a multiplication of blunders, he added, with increased indifference, “I simply can’t see what you can find to interest you in such a book.”

She seemed to consider this intently. “You’ve read it, then?”

“I glanced at it—I never read such things.”

“Is it true that she didn’t wish the letters to be published?”

Glennard felt the sudden dizziness of the mountaineer on a narrow ledge, and with it the sense that he was lost if he looked more than a step ahead.

“I’m sure I don’t know,” he said; then, summoning a smile, he passed his hand through her arm. “I didn’t have tea at the Dreshams’, you know; won’t you give me some now?” he suggested.

That evening Glennard, under pretext of work to be done, shut himself into the small study opening off the drawing-room. As he gathered up his papers he said to his wife: “You’re not going to sit indoors on such a night as this? I’ll join you presently outside.”

But she had drawn her arm-chair to the lamp. “I want to look at my book,” she said, taking up the first volume of the *Letters*.

Glennard, with a shrug, withdrew into the study. “I’m going to shut the door; I want to be quiet,” he explained from the threshold; and she nodded without lifting her eyes from the book.

He sank into a chair, staring aimlessly at the outspread papers. How was he to work, while on the other side of the door she sat with that volume in her hand? The door did not shut her out—he saw her distinctly, felt her close to him in a contact as painful as the pressure

on a bruise.

The sensation was part of the general strangeness that made him feel like a man waking from a long sleep to find himself in an unknown country among people of alien tongue. We live in our own souls as in an unmapped region, a few acres of which we have cleared for our habitation; while of the nature of those nearest us we know but the boundaries that march with ours. Of the points in his wife's character not in direct contact with his own, Glennard now discerned his ignorance; and the baffling sense of her remoteness was intensified by the discovery that, in one way, she was closer to him than ever before. As one may live for years in happy unconsciousness of the possession of a sensitive nerve, he had lived beside his wife unaware that her individuality had become a part of the texture of his life, ineradicable as some growth on a vital organ; and he now felt himself at once incapable of forecasting her judgment and powerless to evade its effects.

To escape, the next morning, the confidences of the breakfast-table, he went to town earlier than usual. His wife, who read slowly, was given to talking over what she read, and at present his first object in life was to postpone the inevitable discussion of the letters. This instinct of protection, in the afternoon, on his way up town, guided him to the club in search of a man who might be persuaded to come out to the country to dine. The only man in the club was Flamel.

Glennard, as he heard himself almost involuntarily pressing Flamel to come and dine, felt the full irony of the situation. To use Flamel as a shield against his wife's scrutiny was only a shade less humiliating than to reckon on his wife as a defence against Flamel.

He felt a contradictory movement of annoyance at the latter's ready acceptance, and the two men drove in silence to the station. As they passed the book-stall in the waiting-room Flamel lingered a moment, and the eyes of both fell on Margaret Aubyn's name, conspicuously displayed above a counter stacked with the familiar

volumes.

"We shall be late, you know," Glennard remonstrated, pulling out his watch.

"Go ahead," said Flamel imperturbably. "I want to get something —"

Glennard turned on his heel and walked down the platform. Flamel rejoined him with an innocent-looking magazine in his hand; but Glennard dared not even glance at the cover, lest it should show the syllables he feared.

The train was full of people they knew, and they were kept apart till it dropped them at the little suburban station. As they strolled up the shaded hill, Glennard talked volubly, pointing out the improvements in the neighborhood, deploring the threatened approach of an electric railway, and screening himself by a series of reflex adjustments from the risk of any allusion to the *Letters*. Flamel suffered his discourse with the bland inattention that we accord to the affairs of some one else's suburb, and they reached the shelter of Alexa's tea-table without a perceptible turn toward the dreaded topic.

The dinner passed off safely. Flamel, always at his best in Alexa's presence, gave her the kind of attention which is like a becoming light thrown on the speaker's words: his answers seemed to bring out a latent significance in her phrases, as the sculptor draws his statue from the block. Glennard, under his wife's composure, detected a sensibility to this manœuvre, and the discovery was like the lightning-flash across a nocturnal landscape. Thus far these momentary illuminations had served only to reveal the strangeness of the intervening country: each fresh observation seemed to increase the sum-total of his ignorance. Her simplicity of outline was more puzzling than a complex surface. One may conceivably work one's way through a labyrinth; but Alexa's candor was like a snow-covered plain, where, the road once lost, there are no landmarks to travel by.

Dinner over, they returned to the veranda, where a moon, rising

behind the old elm, was combining with that complaisant tree a romantic enlargement of their borders. Glennard had forgotten the cigars. He went to his study to fetch them, and in passing through the drawing-room he saw the second volume of the *Letters* lying open on his wife's table. He picked up the book and looked at the date of the letter she had been reading. It was one of the last . . . he knew the few lines by heart. He dropped the book and leaned against the wall. Why had he included that one among the others? Or was it possible that now they would all seem like that . . . ?

Alexa's voice came suddenly out of the dusk. "May Touchett was right—it is like listening at a keyhole. I wish I hadn't read it!"

Flamel returned, in the leisurely tone of the man whose phrases are punctuated by a cigarette, "It seems so to us, perhaps; but to another generation the book will be a classic."

"Then it ought not to have been published till it had time to become a classic. It's horrible, it's degrading almost, to read the secrets of a woman one might have known." She added, in a lower tone, "Stephen *did* know her—"

"Did he?" came from Flamel.

"He knew her very well, at Hillbridge, years ago. The book has made him feel dreadfully . . . he wouldn't read it . . . he didn't want me to read it. I didn't understand at first, but now I can see how horribly disloyal it must seem to him. It's so much worse to surprise a friend's secrets than a stranger's."

"Oh, Glennard's such a sensitive chap," Flamel said easily; and Alexa almost rebukingly rejoined, "If you'd known her I'm sure you'd feel as he does. . . ."

Glennard stood motionless, overcome by the singular infelicity with which he had contrived to put Flamel in possession of the two points most damaging to his case: the fact that he had been a friend of Margaret Aubyn's and that he had concealed from Alexa his share in the publication of the letters. To a man of less than Flamel's astuteness it must now be clear to whom the letters were addressed;

and the possibility once suggested, nothing could be easier than to confirm it by discreet research. An impulse of self-accusal drove Glennard to the window. Why not anticipate betrayal by telling his wife the truth in Flamel's presence? If the man had a drop of decent feeling in him, such a course would be the surest means of securing his silence; and above all, it would rid Glennard of the necessity of defending himself against the perpetual criticism of his wife's belief in him. . . .

The impulse was strong enough to carry him to the window; but there a reaction of defiance set in. What had he done, after all, to need defence and explanation? Both Dresham and Flamel had, in his hearing, declared the publication of the letters to be not only justifiable but obligatory; and if the disinterestedness of Flamel's verdict might be questioned, Dresham's at least represented the impartial view of the man of letters. As to Alexa's words, they were simply the conventional utterance of the "nice" woman on a question already decided for her by other "nice" women. She had said the proper thing as mechanically as she would have put on the appropriate gown or written the correct form of dinner invitation. Glennard had small faith in the abstract judgments of the other sex: he knew that half the women who were horrified by the publication of Mrs. Aubyn's letters would have betrayed her secrets without a scruple.

The sudden lowering of his emotional pitch brought a proportionate relief. He told himself that now the worst was over and things would fall into perspective again. His wife and Flamel had turned to other topics, and coming out on the veranda, he handed the cigars to Flamel, saying cheerfully—and yet he could have sworn they were the last words he meant to utter!—"Look here, old man, before you go down to Newport you must come out and spend a few days with us—mustn't he, Alexa?"

Glennard, perhaps unconsciously, had counted on the continuance of this easier mood. He had always taken pride in a certain robustness of fibre that enabled him to harden himself against the inevitable, to convert his failures into the building materials of success. Though it did not even now occur to him that what he called the inevitable had hitherto been the alternative he happened to prefer, he was yet obscurely aware that his present difficulty was one not to be conjured by any affectation of indifference. Some griefs build the soul a spacious house, but in this misery of Glennard's he could not stand upright. It pressed against him at every turn. He told himself that this was because there was no escape from the visible evidences of his act. The *Letters* confronted him everywhere. People who had never opened a book discussed them with critical reservations; to have read them had become a social obligation in circles to which literature never penetrates except in a personal guise.

Glennard did himself injustice. It was from the unexpected discovery of his own pettiness that he chiefly suffered. Our self-esteem is apt to be based on the hypothetical great act we have never had occasion to perform; and even the most self-scrutinizing modesty credits itself negatively with a high standard of conduct. Glennard had never thought himself a hero; but he had been certain that he was incapable of baseness. We all like our wrongdoings to have a becoming cut, to be made to order, as it were; and Glennard found himself suddenly thrust into a garb of dishonor surely meant for a meaner figure.

The immediate result of his first weeks of wretchedness was the resolve to go to town for the winter. He knew that such a course was just beyond the limit of prudence; but it was easy to allay the fears of Alexa, who, scrupulously vigilant in the management of the household, preserved the American wife's usual aloofness from her husband's business cares. Glennard felt that he could not trust himself to a winter's solitude with her. He had an unspeakable dread

of her learning the truth about the letters, yet could not be sure of steeling himself against the suicidal impulse of avowal. His very soul was parched for sympathy; he thirsted for a voice of pity and comprehension. But would his wife pity? Would she understand? Again he found himself brought up abruptly against his incredible ignorance of her nature. The fact that he knew well enough how she would behave in the ordinary emergencies of life, that he could count, in such contingencies, on the kind of high courage and directness he had always divined in her, made him the more hopeless of her entering into the tortuous psychology of an act that he himself could no longer explain or understand. It would have been easier had she been more complex, more feminine—if he could have counted on her imaginative sympathy or her moral obtuseness—but he was sure of neither. He was sure of nothing but that, for a time, he must avoid her. Glennard could not rid himself of the delusion that by and by his action would cease to make its consequences felt. He would not have cared to own to himself that he counted on the dulling of his sensibilities: he preferred to indulge the vague hypothesis that extraneous circumstances would somehow efface the blot upon his conscience. In his worst moments of self-abasement he tried to find solace in the thought that Flamel had sanctioned his course. Flamel, at the outset, must have guessed to whom the letters were addressed; yet neither then nor afterward had he hesitated to advise their publication. This thought drew Glennard to him in fitful impulses of friendliness, from each of which there was a sharper reaction of distrust and aversion. When Flamel was not at the house, he missed the support of his tacit connivance; when he was there, his presence seemed the assertion of an intolerable claim.

Early in the winter the Glennards took possession of the little house that was to cost them almost nothing. The change brought Glennard the relief of seeing less of his wife, and of being protected, in her presence, by the multiplied preoccupations of town life. Alexa, who could never appear hurried, showed the smiling abstraction of a

pretty woman to whom the social side of married life has not lost its novelty. Glennard, with the recklessness of a man fresh from his first financial imprudence, encouraged her in such little extravagances as her good sense at first resisted. Since they had come to town, he argued, they might as well enjoy themselves. He took a sympathetic view of the necessity of new gowns, he gave her a set of furs at Christmas, and before the New Year they had agreed on the necessity of adding a parlor-maid to their small establishment.

Providence the very next day hastened to justify this measure by placing on Glennard's breakfast-plate an envelope bearing the name of the publishers to whom he had sold Mrs. Aubyn's letters. It happened to be the only letter the early post had brought, and he glanced across the table at his wife, who had come down before him and had probably laid the envelope on his plate. She was not the woman to ask awkward questions, but he felt the conjecture of her glance, and he was debating whether to affect surprise at the receipt of the letter, or to pass it off as a business communication that had strayed to his house, when a check fell from the envelope. It was the royalty on the first edition of the letters. His first feeling was one of simple satisfaction. The money had come with such infernal opportuneness that he could not help welcoming it. Before long, too, there would be more; he knew the book was still selling far beyond the publishers' previsions. He put the check in his pocket and left the room without looking at his wife.

On the way to his office the habitual reaction set in. The money he had received was the first tangible reminder that he was living on the sale of his self-esteem. The thought of material benefit had been overshadowed by his sense of the intrinsic baseness of making the letters known: now he saw what an element of sordidness it added to the situation and how the fact that he needed the money, and must use it, pledged him more irrevocably than ever to the consequences of his act. It seemed to him, in that first hour of misery, that he had betrayed his friend anew.

When, that afternoon, he reached home earlier than usual, Alexa's drawing-room was full of a gayety that overflowed to the stairs. Flamel, for a wonder, was not there; but Dresham and young Hartly, grouped about the tea-table, were receiving with resonant mirth a narrative delivered in the fluttered staccato that made Mrs. Armiger's conversation like the ejaculations of a startled aviary.

She paused as Glennard entered, and he had time to notice that his wife, who was busied about the tea-tray, had not joined in the laughter of the men.

"Oh, go on, go on," young Hartly rapturously groaned; and Mrs. Armiger met Glennard's inquiry with the deprecating cry that really she didn't see what there was to laugh at. "I'm sure I feel more like crying. I don't know what I should have done if Alexa hadn't been at home to give me a cup of tea. My nerves are in shreds—yes, another, dear, please—" and as Glennard looked his perplexity, she went on, after pondering on the selection of a second lump of sugar, "Why, I've just come from the reading, you know—the reading at the Waldorf."

"I haven't been in town long enough to know anything," said Glennard, taking the cup his wife handed him. "Who has been reading what?"

"That lovely girl from the South—Georgie—Georgie What's-her-name—Mrs. Dresham's protégée—unless she's *yours*, Mr. Dresham! Why, the big ball-room was *packed*, and all the women were crying like idiots—it was the most harrowing thing I ever heard—"

"What *did* you hear?" Glennard asked; and his wife interposed: "Won't you have another bit of cake, Julia? Or, Stephen, ring for some hot toast, please." Her tone betrayed a polite weariness of the topic under discussion. Glennard turned to the bell, but Mrs. Armiger pursued him with her lovely amazement.

"Why, the *Aubyn Letters*—didn't you know about it? She read them so beautifully that it was quite horrible—I should have fainted if there'd been a man near enough to carry me out."

Hartly's glee redoubled, and Dresham said jovially, "How like you women to raise a shriek over the book and then do all you can to encourage the blatant publicity of the readings!"

Mrs. Armiger met him more than half-way on a torrent of self-accusal. "It *was* horrid; it was disgraceful. I told your wife we ought all to be ashamed of ourselves for going, and I think Alexa was quite right to refuse to take any tickets—even if it was for a charity."

"Oh," her hostess murmured indifferently, "with me charity begins at home. I can't afford emotional luxuries."

"A charity? A charity?" Hartly exulted. "I hadn't seized the full beauty of it. Reading poor Margaret Aubyn's love-letters at the Waldorf before five hundred people for a charity! *What* charity, dear Mrs. Armiger?"

"Why, the Home for Friendless Women—"

"It was well chosen," Dresham commented; and Hartly buried his mirth in the sofa cushions.

When they were alone Glennard, still holding his untouched cup of tea, turned to his wife, who sat silently behind the kettle. "Who asked you to take a ticket for that reading?"

"I don't know, really—Kate Dresham, I fancy. It was she who got it up."

"It's just the sort of damnable vulgarity she's capable of! It's loathsome—it's monstrous—"

His wife, without looking up, answered gravely, "I thought so too. It was for that reason I didn't go. But you must remember that very few people feel about Mrs. Aubyn as you do—"

Glennard managed to set down his cup with a steady hand, but the room swung round with him and he dropped into the nearest chair. "As I do?" he repeated.

"I mean that very few people knew her when she lived in New York. To most of the women who went to the reading she was a mere name, too remote to have any personality. With me, of course, it was

different—”

Glennard gave her a startled look. “Different? Why different?”

“Since you were her friend—”

“Her friend!” He stood up. “You speak as if she had had only one—the most famous woman of her day!” He moved vaguely about the room, bending down to look at some books on the table. “I hope,” he added, “you didn’t give that as a reason?”

“A reason?”

“For not going. A woman who gives reasons for getting out of social obligations is sure to make herself unpopular or ridiculous.”

The words were uncalculated; but in an instant he saw that they had strangely bridged the distance between his wife and himself. He felt her close on him, like a panting foe; and her answer was a flash that showed the hand on the trigger.

“I seem,” she said from the threshold, “to have done both in giving my reason to you.”

The fact that they were dining out that evening made it easy for him to avoid Alexa till she came downstairs in her opera-cloak. Mrs. Touchett, who was going to the same dinner, had offered to call for her; and Glennard, refusing a precarious seat between the ladies’ draperies, followed on foot. The evening was interminable. The reading at the Waldorf, at which all the women had been present, had revived the discussion of the *Aubyn Letters*, and Glennard, hearing his wife questioned as to her absence, felt himself miserably wishing that she had gone, rather than that her staying away should have been remarked. He was rapidly losing all sense of proportion where the *Letters* were concerned. He could no longer hear them mentioned without suspecting a purpose in the allusion; he even yielded himself for a moment to the extravagance of imagining that Mrs. Dresham, whom he disliked, had organized the reading in the hope of making him betray himself—for he was already sure that Dresham had divined his share in the transaction.

The attempt to keep a smooth surface on this inner tumult was as endless and unavailing as efforts made in a nightmare. He lost all sense of what he was saying to his neighbors; and once when he looked up his wife's glance struck him cold.

She sat nearly opposite him, at Flamel's side, and it appeared to Glennard that they had built about themselves one of those airy barriers of talk behind which two people can say what they please. While the reading was discussed they were silent. Their silence seemed to Glennard almost cynical—it stripped the last disguise from their complicity. A throb of anger rose in him, but suddenly it fell, and he felt, with a curious sense of relief, that at bottom he no longer cared whether Flamel had told his wife or not. The assumption that Flamel knew about the letters had become a fact to Glennard; and it now seemed to him better that Alexa should know too.

He was frightened at first by the discovery of his own indifference. The last barriers of his will seemed to be breaking down before a flood of moral lassitude. How could he continue to play his part, how keep his front to the enemy, with this poison of indifference stealing through his veins? He tried to brace himself with the remembrance of his wife's scorn. He had not forgotten the note on which their conversation had closed. If he had ever wondered how she would receive the truth he wondered no longer—she would despise him. But this lent a new insidiousness to his temptation, since her contempt would be a refuge from his own. He said to himself that, since he no longer cared for the consequences, he could at least acquit himself of speaking in self-defence. What he wanted now was not immunity but castigation: his wife's indignation might still reconcile him to himself. Therein lay his one hope of regeneration; her scorn was the moral antiseptic that he needed, her comprehension the one balm that could heal him. . . .

When they left the dinner he was so afraid of speaking that he let her drive home alone, and went to the club with Flamel.

He rose next morning with the resolve to know what Alexa thought of him. It was not anchoring in a haven but lying to in a storm—he felt the need of a temporary lull in the turmoil of his sensations.

He came home late, for they were dining alone and he knew that they would have the evening together. When he followed her to the drawing-room after dinner he thought himself on the point of speaking; but as she handed him his coffee he said involuntarily: "I shall have to carry this off to the study; I've got a lot of work to-night."

Alone in the study he cursed his cowardice. What was it that had withheld him? A certain bright unapproachableness seemed to keep him at arm's length. She was not the kind of woman whose compassion could be circumvented; there was no chance of slipping past the outposts—he would never take her by surprise. Well—why not face her, then? What he shrank from could be no worse than what he was enduring. He had pushed back his chair and turned to go upstairs when a new expedient presented itself. What if, instead of telling her, he were to let her find out for herself and watch the effect of the discovery before speaking? In this way he made over to chance the burden of the revelation.

The idea had been suggested by the sight of the formula enclosing the publisher's check. He had deposited the money, but the notice accompanying it dropped from his note-case as he cleared his table for work. It was the formula usual in such cases, and revealed clearly enough that he was the recipient of a royalty on Margaret Aubyn's letters. It would be impossible for Alexa to read it without understanding at once that the letters had been written to him and that he had sold them. . . .

He sat downstairs till he heard her ring for the parlor-maid to put out the lights; then he went up to the drawing-room with a bundle of papers in his hand. Alexa was just rising from her seat, and the

lamplight fell on the deep roll of hair that overhung her brow like the eaves of a temple. Her face had often the high secluded look of a shrine; and it was this touch of awe in her beauty that now made him feel himself on the brink of sacrilege.

Lest the feeling should control him, he spoke at once. "I've brought you a piece of work—a lot of old bills and things that I want you to sort for me. Some are not worth keeping—but you'll be able to judge of that. There may be a letter or two among them—nothing of much account; but I don't like to throw away the whole lot without having them looked over, and I haven't time to do it myself."

He held out the papers, and she took them with a smile that seemed to recognize in the service he asked the tacit intention of making amends for the incident of the previous day.

"Are you sure I shall know which to keep?"

"Oh, quite sure," he answered easily; "and besides, none are of much importance."

The next morning he invented an excuse for leaving the house without seeing her, and when he returned, just before dinner, he found a visitor's hat and stick in the hall. The visitor was Flamel, who was just taking leave.

He had risen, but Alexa remained seated; and their attitude gave the impression of a colloquy that had prolonged itself beyond the limits of speech. Both turned a surprised eye on Glennard, and he had the sense of walking into a room grown suddenly empty, as though their thoughts were conspirators dispersed by his approach. He felt the clutch of his old fear. What if his wife had already sorted the papers and had told Flamel of her discovery? Well, it was no news to Flamel that Glennard was in receipt of a royalty on the *Aubyn Letters*. . .

A sudden resolve to know the worst made him lift his eyes to his wife as the door closed on Flamel. But Alexa had risen also, and bending over her writing-table, with her back to Glennard, was beginning to speak precipitately.

"I'm dining out to-night—you don't mind my deserting you? Julia Armiger sent me word just now that she had an extra ticket for the last Ambrose concert. She told me to say how sorry she was that she hadn't two, but I knew *you* wouldn't be sorry!" She ended with a laugh that had the effect of being a strayed echo of Mrs. Armiger's; and before Glennard could speak she had added, with her hand on the door, "Mr. Flamel stayed so late that I've hardly time to dress. The concert begins ridiculously early, and Julia dines at half-past seven."

Glennard stood alone in the empty room that seemed somehow full of an ironical consciousness of what was happening. "She hates me," he murmured. "She hates me . . ."

The next day was Sunday, and Glennard purposely lingered late in his room. When he came downstairs his wife was already seated at the breakfast-table. She lifted her usual smile to his entrance and they took shelter in the nearest topic, like wayfarers overtaken by a storm. While he listened to her account of the concert he began to think that, after all, she had not yet sorted the papers, and that her agitation of the previous day must be ascribed to another cause, in which perhaps he had but an indirect concern. He wondered it had never before occurred to him that Flamel was the kind of man who might very well please a woman at his own expense, without need of fortuitous assistance. If this possibility cleared the outlook it did not brighten it. Glennard merely felt himself left alone with his baseness.

Alexa left the breakfast-table before him, and when he went up to the drawing-room he found her dressed to go out. "Aren't you a little early for church?" he asked.

She replied that, on the way there, she meant to stop a moment at her mother's; and while she drew on her gloves he fumbled among the knick-knacks on the mantelpiece for a match to light his cigarette.

"Well, good-bye," she said, turning to go; and from the threshold

she added: "By the way, I've sorted the papers you gave me. Those that I thought you would like to keep are on your study table." She went downstairs and he heard the door close behind her.

She had sorted the papers—she knew, then—she *must* know—and she had made no sign!

Glennard, he hardly knew how, found himself once more in the study. On the table lay the packet he had given her. It was much smaller—she had evidently gone over the papers with care, destroying the greater number. He loosened the elastic band and spread the remaining envelopes on his desk. The publisher's notice was among them.

X

His wife knew and she made no sign. Glennard found himself in the case of the seafarer who, closing his eyes at nightfall on a scene he thinks to put leagues behind him before day, wakes to a port-hole framing the same patch of shore. From the kind of exaltation to which his resolve had lifted him he dropped to an unreasoning apathy. His impulse of confession had acted as a drug to self-reproach. He had tried to shift a portion of his burden to his wife's shoulders; and now that she had tacitly refused to carry it, he felt the load too heavy to be taken up.

A fortunate interval of hard work brought respite from this phase of sterile misery. He went West to argue an important case, won it, and came back to fresh preoccupations. His own affairs were thriving enough to engross him in the pauses of his professional work, and for over two months he had little time to look himself in the face. Not unnaturally—for he was as yet unskilled in the subtleties of introspection—he mistook his temporary insensibility for a gradual revival of moral health.

He told himself that he was recovering his sense of proportion, getting to see things in their true light; and if he now thought of his rash appeal to his wife's sympathy it was as an act of folly from the

consequences of which he had been saved by the providence that watches over madmen. He had little leisure to observe Alexa; but he concluded that the common sense momentarily denied him had counselled her silent acceptance of the inevitable. If such a quality was a poor substitute for the passionate justness that had once seemed to distinguish her, he accepted the alternative as a part of that general lowering of the key that seems needful to the maintenance of the matrimonial duet. What woman ever retained her abstract sense of justice where another woman was concerned? Possibly the thought that he had profited by Mrs. Aubyn's tenderness was not wholly disagreeable to his wife.

When the pressure of work began to lessen, and he found himself, in the lengthening afternoons, able to reach home somewhat earlier, he noticed that the little drawing-room was always full and that he and his wife seldom had an evening alone together. When he was tired, as often happened, she went out alone; the idea of giving up an engagement to remain with him seemed not to occur to her. She had shown, as a girl, little fondness for society, nor had she seemed to regret it during the year they had spent in the country. He reflected, however, that he was sharing the common lot of husbands, who proverbially mistake the early ardors of housekeeping for a sign of settled domesticity. Alexa, at any rate, was refuting his theory as inconsiderately as a seedling defeats the gardener's expectations. An indefinable change had come over her. In one sense it was a happy one, since she had grown, if not handsomer, at least more vivid and expressive; her beauty had become more communicable: it was as though she had learned the conscious exercise of intuitive attributes and now used her effects with the discrimination of an artist skilled in values. To a dispassionate critic (as Glennard now rated himself) the art may at times have been a little too obvious. Her attempts at lightness lacked spontaneity, and she sometimes rasped him by laughing like Julia Armiger; but he had enough imagination to perceive that, in respect of his wife's social arts, a husband

necessarily sees the wrong side of the tapestry.

In this ironical estimate of their relation Glennard found himself strangely relieved of all concern as to his wife's feelings for Flamel. From an Olympian pinnacle of indifference he calmly surveyed their inoffensive antics. It was surprising how his cheapening of his wife put him at ease with himself. Far as he and she were from each other they yet had, in a sense, the tacit nearness of complicity. Yes, they were accomplices; he could no more be jealous of her than she could despise him. The jealousy that would once have seemed a blur on her whiteness now appeared like a tribute to ideals in which he no longer believed.

Glennard was little given to exploring the outskirts of literature. He always skipped the "literary notices" in the papers, and he had small leisure for the intermittent pleasures of the periodical. He had therefore no notion of the prolonged reverberations which the *Aubyn Letters* had awakened. When the book ceased to be talked about he supposed it had ceased to be read; and this apparent subsidence of the agitation about it brought the reassuring sense that he had exaggerated its vitality. The conviction, if it did not ease his conscience, at least offered him the relative relief of obscurity; he felt like an offender taken down from the pillory and thrust into the soothing darkness of a cell.

But one evening, when Alexa had left him to go to a dance, he chanced to turn over the magazines on her table, and the copy of the *Horoscope* to which he settled down with his cigar confronted him, on its first page, with a portrait of Margaret Aubyn. It was a reproduction of the photograph that had stood so long on his desk. The desiccating air of memory had turned her into the mere abstraction of a woman, and this unexpected evocation seemed to bring her nearer than she had ever been in life. Was it because he understood her better? He looked long into her eyes; little personal traits reached out to him like caresses—the tired droop of her lids,

her quick way of leaning forward as she spoke, the movements of her long expressive hands. All that was feminine in her, the quality he had always missed, stole toward him from her unreproachful gaze; and now that it was too late, life had developed in him the subtler perceptions which could detect it in even this poor semblance of herself. For a moment he found consolation in the thought that, at any cost, they had thus been brought together; then a sense of shame rushed over him. Face to face with her, he felt himself laid bare to the inmost fold of consciousness. The shame was deep, but it was a renovating anguish: he was like a man whom intolerable pain has roused from the creeping lethargy of death. . .

He rose next morning to as fresh a sense of life as though his hour of communion with Margaret Aubyn had been a more exquisite renewal of their earlier meetings. His waking thought was that he must see her again; and as consciousness affirmed itself he felt an intense fear of losing the sense of her nearness. But she was still close to him: her presence remained the one reality in a world of shadows. All through his working hours he was re-living with incredible minuteness every incident of their obliterated past: as a man who has mastered the spirit of a foreign tongue turns with renewed wonder to the pages his youth has plodded over. In this lucidity of retrospection the most trivial detail had its meaning, and the joy of recovery was embittered to Glennard by the perception of all that he had missed. He had been pitiably, grotesquely stupid; and there was irony in the thought that, but for the crisis through which he was passing, he might have lived on in complacent ignorance of his loss. It was as though she had bought him with her blood. . .

That evening he and Alexa dined alone. After dinner he followed her to the drawing-room. He no longer felt the need of avoiding her; he was hardly conscious of her presence. After a few words they lapsed into silence, and he sat smoking with his eyes on the fire. It was not that he was unwilling to talk to her; he felt a curious desire

to be as kind as possible; but he was always forgetting that she was there. Her full bright presence, through which the currents of life flowed so warmly, had grown as tenuous as a shadow, and he saw so far beyond her.

Presently she rose and began to move about the room. She seemed to be looking for something, and he roused himself to ask what she wanted.

"Only the last number of the *Horoscope*. I thought I'd left it on this table." He said nothing, and she went on: "You haven't seen it?"

"No," he returned coldly. The magazine was locked in his desk.

His wife had moved to the mantelpiece. She stood facing him, and as he looked up he met her tentative gaze. "I was reading an article in it—a review of Mrs. Aubyn's *Letters*," she added slowly, with her deep deliberate blush.

Glennard stooped to toss his cigar into the fire. He felt a savage wish that she would not speak the other woman's name; nothing else seemed to matter.

"You seem to do a lot of reading," he said.

She still confronted him. "I was keeping this for you—I thought it might interest you," she said with an air of gentle insistence.

He stood up and turned away. He was sure she knew that he had taken the review, and he felt that he was beginning to hate her again.

"I haven't time for such things," he said indifferently. As he moved to the door he heard her take a hurried step forward; then she paused, and sank without speaking into the chair from which he had risen.

XI

As Glennard, in the raw February sunlight, mounted the road to the cemetery, he felt the beatitude that comes with an abrupt cessation of physical pain. He had reached the point where self-analysis ceases; the impulse that moved him was purely intuitive. He

did not even seek a reason for it, beyond the obvious one that his desire to stand by Margaret Aubyn's grave was prompted by no attempt at a sentimental reparation, but rather by the need to affirm in some way the reality of the tie between them.

The ironical promiscuity of death had brought Mrs. Aubyn back to share the hospitality of her husband's last lodging; but though Glennard knew she had been buried near New York he had never visited her grave. He was oppressed, as he now threaded the long avenues, by a chilling vision of her return. There was no family to follow her hearse; she had died alone, as she had lived; and the "distinguished mourners" who had formed the escort of the famous writer knew nothing of the woman they were committing to the grave. Glennard could not even remember at what season she had been buried; but his mood indulged the fancy that it must have been on some such day of harsh sunlight, the incisive February brightness that gives perspicuity without warmth. The white avenues stretched before him interminably, lined with stereotyped emblems of affliction, as though all the platitudes ever uttered had been turned to marble and set up over the unresisting dead. Here and there, no doubt, a frigid urn or an insipid angel imprisoned some fine-fibred grief, as the most hackneyed words may become the vehicle of rare meanings; but for the most part the endless alignment of monuments seemed to embody those easy generalizations about death that do not disturb the repose of the living. Glennard's eye, as he followed the way pointed out to him, had instinctively sought some low mound with a quiet headstone. He had forgotten that the dead seldom plan their own houses, and with a pang he discovered the name he sought on the cyclopean base of a shaft rearing its aggressive height at the angle of two avenues.

"How she would have hated it!" he murmured.

A bench stood near and he seated himself. The monument rose before him like some pretentious uninhabited dwelling: he could not believe that Margaret Aubyn lay there. It was a Sunday morning, and

black figures moved among the paths, placing flowers on the frost-bound hillocks. Glennard noticed that the neighboring graves had been thus newly dressed, and he fancied a blind stir of expectancy through the sod, as though the bare mounds spread a parched surface to that commemorative rain. He rose presently and walked back to the entrance of the cemetery. Several greenhouses stood near the gates, and turning in at the first he asked for some flowers.

“Anything in the emblematic line?” asked the anæmic man behind the dripping counter.

Glennard shook his head.

“Just cut flowers? This way then.” The florist unlocked a glass door and led him down a moist green aisle. The hot air was choked with the scent of white azaleas, white lilies, white lilacs; all the flowers were white: they were like a prolongation, a mystic efflorescence, of the long rows of marble tombstones, and their perfume seemed to cover an odor of decay. The rich atmosphere made Glennard dizzy. As he leaned in the doorway, waiting for the flowers, he had a penetrating sense of Margaret Aubyn’s nearness—not the imponderable presence of his inner vision, but a life that beat warm in his arms. . .

The sharp air caught him as he stepped out into it again. He walked back and scattered the flowers over the grave. The edges of the white petals shrivelled like burnt paper in the cold; and as he watched them the illusion of her nearness faded, shrank back frozen.

XII

The motive of his visit to the cemetery remained undefined save as a final effort of escape from his wife’s inexpressive acceptance of his shame. It seemed to him that as long as he could keep himself alive to that shame he would not wholly have succumbed to its consequences. His chief fear was that he should become the creature of his act. His wife’s indifference degraded him: it seemed to put him on a level with his dishonor. Margaret Aubyn would have abhorred

the deed in proportion to her pity for the man. The sense of her potential pity drew him back to her. The one woman knew but did not understand; the other, it sometimes seemed, understood without knowing.

In its last disguise of retrospective remorse, his self-pity affected a desire for solitude and meditation. He lost himself in morbid musings, in futile visions of what life with Margaret Aubyn might have been. There were moments when, in the strange dislocation of his view, the wrong he had done her seemed a tie between them.

To indulge these emotions he fell into the habit, on Sunday afternoons, of solitary walks prolonged till after dusk. The days were lengthening, there was a touch of spring in the air, and his wanderings now usually led him to the Park and its outlying regions.

One Sunday, tired of aimless locomotion, he took a cab at the Park gates and let it carry him out to the Riverside Drive. It was a gray afternoon streaked with east wind. Glennard's cab advanced slowly, and as he leaned back, gazing with absent intentness at the deserted paths that wound under bare boughs between grass banks of premature vividness, his attention was arrested by two figures walking ahead of him. This couple, who had the path to themselves, moved at an uneven pace, as though adapting their gait to a conversation marked by meditative intervals. Now and then they paused, and in one of these pauses the lady, turning toward her companion, showed Glennard the outline of his wife's profile. The man was Flamel.

The blood rushed to Glennard's forehead. He sat up with a jerk and pushed back the lid in the roof of the hansom; but when the cabman bent down he dropped into his seat without speaking. Then, becoming conscious of the prolonged interrogation of the lifted lid, he called out—"Turn—drive back—anywhere—I'm in a hurry—"

As the cab swung round he caught a last glimpse of the two figures. They had not moved; Alexa, with bent head, stood listening.

"My God, my God—" he groaned.

It was hideous—it was abominable—he could not understand it. The woman was nothing to him—less than nothing—yet the blood hummed in his ears and hung a cloud before him. He knew it was only the stirring of the primal instinct, that it had no more to do with his reasoning self than any reflex impulse of the body; but that merely lowered anguish to disgust. Yes, it was disgust he felt—almost a physical nausea. The poisonous fumes of life were in his lungs. He was sick, unutterably sick. . .

He drove home and went to his room. They were giving a little dinner that night, and when he came down the guests were arriving. He looked at his wife: her beauty was extraordinary, but it seemed to him the beauty of a smooth sea along an unlit coast. She frightened him.

He sat late in his study. He heard the parlor-maid lock the front door; then his wife went upstairs and the lights were put out. His brain was like some great empty hall with an echo in it: one thought reverberated endlessly. . . At length he drew his chair to the table and began to write. He addressed an envelope and then slowly re-read what he had written.

“My dear Flamel,

“Many apologies for not sending you sooner the enclosed check, which represents the customary percentage on the sale of the ‘Letters.’

“Trusting you will excuse the oversight,

“Yours truly

“Stephen Glennard.”

He let himself out of the darkened house and dropped the letter in the post-box at the corner.

The next afternoon he was detained late at his office, and as he was preparing to leave he heard some one asking for him in the outer room. He seated himself again and Flamel was shown in.

The two men, as Glennard pushed aside an obstructive chair, had a moment to measure each other; then Flamel advanced, and drawing

out his note-case, laid a slip of paper on the desk.

“My dear fellow, what on earth does this mean?” Glennard recognized his check.

“That I was remiss, simply. It ought to have gone to you before.”

Flamel’s tone had been that of unaffected surprise, but at this his accent changed and he asked quickly: “On what ground?”

Glennard had moved away from the desk and stood leaning against the calf-backed volumes of the bookcase. “On the ground that you sold Mrs. Aubyn’s letters for me, and that I find the intermediary in such cases is entitled to a percentage on the sale.”

Flamel paused before answering. “You find, you say. It’s a recent discovery?”

“Obviously, from my not sending the check sooner. You see I’m new to the business.”

“And since when have you discovered that there was any question of business, as far as I was concerned?”

Glennard flushed and his voice rose slightly. “Are you reproaching me for not having remembered it sooner?”

Flamel, who had spoken in the rapid repressed tone of a man on the verge of anger, stared a moment at this and then, in his natural voice, rejoined good-humoredly, “Upon my soul, I don’t understand you!”

The change of key seemed to disconcert Glennard. “It’s simple enough,” he muttered.

“Simple enough—your offering me money in return for a friendly service? I don’t know what your other friends expect!”

“Some of my friends wouldn’t have undertaken the job. Those who would have done so would probably have expected to be paid.”

He lifted his eyes to Flamel and the two men looked at each other. Flamel had turned white and his lips stirred, but he held his temperate note. “If you mean to imply that the job was not a nice one you lay yourself open to the retort that you proposed it. But for my part I’ve never seen, I never shall see, any reason for not

publishing the letters.”

“That’s just it!”

“What—?”

“The certainty of your not seeing was what made me go to you. When a man’s got stolen goods to pawn he doesn’t take them to the police-station.”

“Stolen?” Flamel echoed. “The letters were stolen?”

Glennard burst into a laugh. “How much longer do you expect me to keep up that pretence about the letters? You knew well enough they were written to me.”

Flamel looked at him in silence. “Were they?” he said at length. “I didn’t know it.”

“And didn’t suspect it, I suppose,” Glennard sneered.

The other was again silent; then he said, “I may remind you that, supposing I had felt any curiosity about the matter, I had no way of finding out that the letters were written to you. You never showed me the originals.”

“What does that prove? There were fifty ways of finding out. It’s the kind of thing one can easily do.”

Flamel glanced at him with contempt. “Our ideas probably differ as to what a man can easily do. It would not have been easy for me.”

Glennard’s anger vented itself in the words uppermost in his thought. “It may, then, interest you to hear that my wife *does* know about the letters—has known for some months. . .”

“Ah,” said the other, slowly.

Glennard saw that, in his blind clutch at a weapon, he had seized the one most apt to wound. Flamel’s muscles were under control, but his face showed the undefinable change produced by the slow infiltration of poison. Every implication that the words contained had reached its mark; but Glennard felt that their obvious intent was lost in the anguish of what they suggested. He was sure now that Flamel would never have betrayed him; but the inference only made a wider outlet for his anger. He paused breathlessly for Flamel to speak.

"If she knows, it's not through me." It was what Glennard had waited for.

"Through you, by God? Who said it was through you? Do you suppose I leave it to you, or to anybody else, for that matter, to keep my wife informed of my actions? I didn't suppose even such egregious conceit as yours could delude a man to that degree!" Struggling for a foothold in the landslide of his dignity, he added in a steadier tone, "My wife learned the facts from me."

Flamel received this in silence. The other's outbreak seemed to have restored his self-control, and when he spoke it was with a deliberation implying that his course was chosen. "In that case I understand still less—"

"Still less—?"

"The meaning of this." He pointed to the check. "When you began to speak I supposed you had meant it as a bribe; now I can only infer it was intended as a random insult. In either case, here's my answer."

He tore the slip of paper in two and tossed the fragments across the desk to Glennard. Then he turned and walked out of the office.

Glennard dropped his head on his hands. If he had hoped to restore his self-respect by the simple expedient of assailing Flamel's, the result had not justified his expectation. The blow he had struck had blunted the edge of his anger, and the unforeseen extent of the hurt inflicted did not alter the fact that his weapon had broken in his hands. He now saw that his rage against Flamel was only the last projection of a passionate self-disgust. This consciousness did not dull his dislike of the man; it simply made reprisals ineffectual. Flamel's unwillingness to quarrel with him was the last stage of his abasement.

In the light of this final humiliation his assumption of his wife's indifference struck him as hardly so fatuous as the sentimental resuscitation of his past. He had been living in a factitious world wherein his emotions were the sycophants of his vanity, and it was with instinctive relief that he felt its ruins crash about his head.

It was nearly dark when he left his office, and he walked slowly homeward in the complete mental abeyance that follows on such a crisis. He was not aware that he was thinking of his wife; yet when he reached his own door he found that, in the involuntary readjustment of his vision, she had once more become the central point of consciousness.

XIII

It had never before occurred to him that she might, after all, have missed the purport of the document he had put in her way. What if, in her hurried inspection of the papers, she had passed it over as related to the private business of some client? What, for instance, was to prevent her concluding that Glennard was the counsel of the unknown person who had sold the *Aubyn Letters*? The subject was one not likely to fix her attention—she was not a curious woman.

Glennard at this point laid down his fork and glanced at her between the candle-shades. The alternative explanation of her indifference was not slow in presenting itself. Her head had the same listening droop as when he had caught sight of her the day before in Flamel's company; the attitude revived the vividness of his impression. It was simple enough, after all. She had ceased to care for him because she cared for some one else.

As he followed her upstairs he felt a sudden stirring of his dormant anger. His sentiments had lost their artificial complexity. He had already acquitted her of any connivance in his baseness, and he felt only that he loved her and that she had escaped him. This was now, strangely enough, his dominant thought: the sense that he and she had passed through the fusion of love and had emerged from it as incommunicably apart as though the transmutation had never taken place. Every other passion, he mused, left some mark upon the nature; but love passed like the flight of a ship across the waters.

She dropped into her usual seat near the lamp, and he leaned against the chimney, moving about with an inattentive hand the

knick-knacks on the mantel.

Suddenly he caught sight of her reflection in the mirror. She was looking at him. He turned and their eyes met.

He moved across the room.

"There's something that I want to say to you," he began.

She held his gaze, but her color deepened. He noticed again, with a jealous pang, how her beauty had gained in warmth and meaning. It was as though a transparent cup had been filled with wine. He looked at her ironically.

"I've never prevented your seeing your friends here," he broke out. "Why do you meet Flamel in out-of-the-way places? Nothing makes a woman so cheap—"

She rose abruptly and they faced each other a few feet apart.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I saw you with him last Sunday on the Riverside Drive," he went on, the utterance of the charge reviving his anger.

"Ah," she murmured. She sank into her chair again and began to play with a paper-knife that lay on the table at her elbow.

Her silence exasperated him.

"Well?" he burst out. "Is that all you have to say?"

"Do you wish me to explain?" she asked proudly. "Do you imply I haven't the right to?"

"I imply nothing. I will tell you whatever you wish to know. I went for a walk with Mr. Flamel because he asked me to."

"I didn't suppose you went uninvited. But there are certain things a sensible woman doesn't do. She doesn't slink about in out-of-the-way streets with men. Why couldn't you have seen him here?"

She hesitated. "Because he wanted to see me alone."

"Did he indeed? And may I ask if you gratify all his wishes with equal alacrity?"

"I don't know that he has any others where I am concerned." She paused again and then continued, in a voice that somehow had an under-note of warning, "He wished to bid me good-bye. He's going

away.”

Glennard turned on her a startled glance. “Going away?” “He’s going to Europe to-morrow. He goes for a long time. I supposed you knew.”

The last phrase revived his irritation. “You forget that I depend on you for my information about Flamel. He’s your friend and not mine. In fact, I’ve sometimes wondered at your going out of your way to be so civil to him when you must see plainly enough that I don’t like him.”

Her answer to this was not immediate. She seemed to be choosing her words with care, not so much for her own sake as for his, and his exasperation was increased by the suspicion that she was trying to spare him.

“He was your friend before he was mine. I never knew him till I was married. It was you who brought him to the house and who seemed to wish me to like him.”

Glennard gave a short laugh. The defence was feebler than he had expected: she was certainly not a clever woman.

“Your deference to my wishes is really beautiful; but it’s not the first time in history that a man has made a mistake in introducing his friends to his wife. You must, at any rate, have seen since then that my enthusiasm had cooled; but so, perhaps, has your eagerness to oblige me.”

She met this with a silence that seemed to rob the taunt of half its efficacy.

“Is that what you imply?” he pressed her.

“No,” she answered with sudden directness. “I noticed some time ago that you seemed to dislike him, but since then—”

“Well—since then?”

“I’ve imagined that you had reasons for still wishing me to be civil to him, as you call it.”

“Ah,” said Glennard with an effort at lightness; but his irony dropped, for something in her voice made him feel that he and she

stood at last in that naked desert of apprehension where meaning skulks vainly behind speech.

“And why did you imagine this?” The blood mounted to his forehead. “Because he told you that I was under obligations to him?”

She turned pale. “Under obligations?”

“Oh, don’t let’s beat about the bush. Didn’t he tell you it was I who published Mrs. Aubyn’s letters? Answer me that.”

“No,” she said; and after a moment which seemed given to the weighing of alternatives, she added: “No one told me.”

“You didn’t know, then?”

She seemed to speak with an effort. “Not until—not until—”

“Till I gave you those papers to sort?”

Her head sank.

“You understood then?”

“Yes.”

He looked at her immovable face. “Had you suspected—before?” was slowly wrung from him.

“At times—yes—.” Her voice dropped to a whisper.

“Why? From anything that was said—?”

There was a shade of pity in her glance. “No one said anything—no one told me anything.” She looked away from him. “It was your manner—”

“My manner?”

“Whenever the book was mentioned. Things you said—once or twice—your irritation—I can’t explain.”

Glennard, unconsciously, had moved nearer. He breathed like a man who has been running. “You knew, then, you knew—” he stammered. The avowal of her love for Flamel would have hurt him less, would have rendered her less remote. “You knew—you knew—” he repeated; and suddenly his anguish gathered voice. “My God!” he cried, “you suspected it first, you say—and then you knew it—this damnable, this accursed thing; you knew it months ago—it’s months since I put that paper in your way—and yet you’ve done nothing,

you've said nothing, you've made no sign, you've lived alongside of me as if it had made no difference—no difference in either of our lives. What are you made of, I wonder? Don't you see the hideous ignominy of it? Don't you see how you've shared in my disgrace? Or haven't you any sense of shame?"

He preserved sufficient lucidity, as the words poured from him, to see how fatally they invited her derision; but something told him they had both passed beyond the phase of obvious retaliations, and that if any chord in her responded it would not be that of scorn.

He was right. She rose slowly and moved toward him. "Haven't you had enough—without that?" she said in a strange voice of pity.

He stared at her. "Enough—?"

"Of misery. . ."

An iron band seemed loosened from his temples. "You saw then . . .?" he whispered.

"Oh, God—oh, God—" she sobbed. She dropped beside him and hid her anguish against his knees. They clung thus in silence a long time, driven together down the same fierce blast of shame.

When at length she lifted her face he averted his. Her scorn would have hurt him less than the tears on his hands.

She spoke languidly, like a child emerging from a passion of weeping. "It was for the money—?"

His lips shaped an assent.

"That was the inheritance—that we married on?"

"Yes."

She drew back and rose to her feet. He sat watching her as she wandered away from him.

"You hate me," broke from him.

She made no answer.

"Say you hate me!" he persisted.

"That would have been so simple," she answered with a strange smile. She dropped into a chair near the writing-table and rested a bowed forehead on her hand.

"Was it much—?" she began at length.

"Much—?" he returned vaguely.

"The money."

"The money?" That part of it seemed to count so little that for a moment he did not follow her thought.

"It must be paid back," she insisted. "Can you do it?"

"Oh, yes," he returned listlessly. "I can do it."

"I would make any sacrifice for that!" she urged.

He nodded. "Of course." He sat staring at her in dry-eyed self-contempt. "Do you count on its making much difference?"

"Much difference?"

"In the way I feel—or you feel about me?"

She shook her head.

"It's the least part of it," he groaned.

"It's the only part we can repair."

"Good heavens! If there were any reparation—" He rose quickly and crossed the space that divided them. "Why did you never speak?"

"Haven't you answered that yourself?"

"Answered it?"

"Just now—when you told me you did it for me."

She paused a moment and then went on with a deepening note—"I would have spoken if I could have helped you."

"But you must have despised me."

"I've told you that would have been simpler."

"But how could you go on like this—hating the money?"

"I knew you'd speak in time. I wanted you, first, to hate it as I did."

He gazed at her with a kind of awe. "You're wonderful," he murmured. "But you don't yet know the depths I've reached."

She raised an entreating hand. "I don't want to!"

"You're afraid, then, that you'll hate me?"

"No—but that you'll hate *me*. Let me understand without your

telling me.”

“You can’t. It’s too base. I thought you didn’t care because you loved Flamel.”

She blushed deeply. “Don’t—don’t—” she warned him.

“I haven’t the right to, you mean?”

“I mean that you’ll be sorry.”

He stood imploringly before her. “I want to say something worse—something more outrageous. If you don’t understand *this* you’ll be perfectly justified in ordering me out of the house.”

She answered him with a glance of divination. “I shall understand—but you’ll be sorry.”

“I must take my chance of that.” He moved away and tossed the books about the table. Then he swung round and faced her. “Does Flamel care for you?” he asked.

Her flush deepened, but she still looked at him without anger. “What would be the use?” she said with a note of sadness.

“Ah, I didn’t ask *that*,” he penitently murmured.

“Well, then—”

To this adjuration he made no response beyond that of gazing at her with an eye which seemed now to view her as a mere factor in an immense redistribution of meanings.

“I insulted Flamel to-day. I let him see that I suspected him of having told you. I hated him because he knew about the letters.”

He caught the spreading horror of her eyes, and for an instant he had to grapple with the new temptation they lit up. Then he said with an effort—“Don’t blame him—he’s impeccable. He helped me to get them published; but I lied to him too; I pretended they were written to another man . . . a man who was dead. . .”

She raised her arms in a gesture that seemed to ward off his blows.

“You *do* despise me!” he insisted.

“Ah, that poor woman—that poor woman—” he heard her murmur.

“I spare no one, you see!” he triumphed over her. She kept her face

hidden.

"You do hate me, you do despise me!" he strangely exulted.

"Be silent!" she commanded him; but he seemed no longer conscious of any check on his gathering purpose.

"He cared for you—he cared for you," he repeated, "and he never told you of the letters—"

She sprang to her feet. "How can you?" she flamed. "How dare you? *That*—!"

Glennard was ashy pale. "It's a weapon . . . like another. . ."

"A scoundrel's!"

He smiled wretchedly. "I should have used it in his place."

"Stephen! Stephen!" she cried, as though to drown the blasphemy on his lips. She swept to him with a rescuing gesture. "Don't say such things. I forbid you! It degrades us both."

He put her back with trembling hands. "Nothing that I say of myself can degrade you. We're on different levels."

"I'm on yours, wherever it is!"

He lifted his head and their gaze flowed together.

XIV

The great renewals take effect as imperceptibly as the first workings of spring. Glennard, though he felt himself brought nearer to his wife, was still, as it were, hardly within speaking distance. He was but laboriously acquiring the rudiments of a new language; and he had to grope for her through the dense fog of his humiliation, the distorting vapor against which his personality loomed grotesque and mean.

Only the fact that we are unaware how well our nearest know us enables us to live with them. Love is the most impregnable refuge of self-esteem, and we hate the eye that reaches to our nakedness. If Glennard did not hate his wife it was slowly, sufferingly, that there was born in him that profounder passion which made his earlier feeling seem a mere commotion of the blood. He was like a child

coming back to the sense of an enveloping presence: her nearness was a breast on which he leaned.

They did not, at first, talk much together, and each beat a devious track about the outskirts of the subject that lay between them like a haunted wood. But every word, every action, seemed to glance at it, to draw toward it, as though a fount of healing sprang in its poisoned shade. If only they might cut a way through the thicket to that restoring spring!

Glennard, watching his wife with the intentness of a wanderer to whom no natural sign is negligable, saw that she had taken temporary refuge in the purpose of renouncing the money. If both, theoretically, owned the inefficacy of such amends, the woman's instinctive subjectiveness made her find relief in this crude form of penance. Glennard saw that she meant to live as frugally as possible till what she deemed their debt was discharged; and he prayed she might not discover how far-reaching, in its merely material sense, was the obligation she thus hoped to acquit. Her mind was fixed on the sum originally paid for the letters, and this he knew he could lay aside in a year or two. He was touched, meanwhile, by the spirit that made her discard the petty luxuries which she regarded as the sign of their bondage. Their shared renunciations drew her nearer to him, helped, in their evidence of her helplessness, to restore the full protecting stature of his love. And still they did not speak.

It was several weeks later that, one afternoon by the drawing-room fire, she handed him a letter that she had been reading when he entered.

"I've heard from Mr. Flamel," she said.

It was as though a latent presence had become visible to both. Glennard took the letter mechanically.

"It's from Smyrna," she said. "Won't you read it?"

He handed it back. "You can tell me about it—his hand's so illegible." He wandered to the other end of the room and then turned

and stood before her. "I've been thinking of writing to Flamel," he said.

She looked up.

"There's one point," he continued slowly, "that I ought to clear up. I told him you'd known about the letters all along; for a long time, at least; and I saw how it hurt him. It was just what I meant to do, of course; but I can't leave him to that false impression; I must write him."

She received this without outward movement, but he saw that the depths were stirred. At length she returned in a hesitating tone, "Why do you call it a false impression? I did know."

"Yes, but I implied you didn't care."

"Ah!"

He still stood looking down on her. "Don't you want me to set that right?" he pursued.

She lifted her head and fixed him bravely. "It isn't necessary," she said.

Glennard flushed with the shock of the retort; then, with a gesture of comprehension, "No," he said, "with you it couldn't be; but I might still set myself right."

She looked at him gently. "Don't I," she murmured, "do that?"

"In being yourself merely? Alas, the rehabilitation's too complete! You make me seem—to myself even—what I'm not; what I can never be. I can't, at times, defend myself from the delusion; but I can at least enlighten others."

The flood was loosened, and kneeling by her he caught her hands. "Don't you see that it's become an obsession with me? That if I could strip myself down to the last lie—only there'd always be another one left under it!—and do penance naked in the market-place, I should at least have the relief of easing one anguish by another? Don't you see that the worst of my torture is the impossibility of such amends?"

Her hands lay in his without returning pressure. "Ah, poor woman, poor woman," he heard her sigh.

“Don’t pity her, pity me! What have I done to her or to you, after all? You’re both inaccessible! It was myself I sold.”

He took an abrupt turn away from her; then halted before her again. “How much longer,” he burst out, “do you suppose you can stand it? You’ve been magnificent, you’ve been inspired, but what’s the use? You can’t wipe out the ignominy of it. It’s miserable for you and it does *her* no good!”

She lifted a vivid face. “That’s the thought I can’t bear!” she cried.

“What thought?”

“That it does her no good—all you’re feeling, all you’re suffering. Can it be that it makes no difference?”

He avoided her challenging glance. “What’s done is done,” he muttered.

“Is it ever, quite, I wonder?” she mused. He made no answer and they lapsed into one of the pauses that are a subterranean channel of communication.

It was she who, after a while, began to speak, with a new suffusing diffidence that made him turn a roused eye on her.

“Don’t they say,” she asked, feeling her way as in a kind of tender apprehensiveness, “that the early Christians, instead of pulling down the heathen temples—the temples of the unclean gods—purified them by turning them to their own uses? I’ve always thought one might do that with one’s actions—the actions one loathes but can’t undo. One can make, I mean, a wrong the door to other wrongs or an impassable wall against them. . .” Her voice wavered on the word. “We can’t always tear down the temples we’ve built to the unclean gods, but we can put good spirits in the house of evil—the spirits of mercy and shame and understanding, that might never have come to us if we hadn’t been in such great need. . .”

She moved over to him and laid a hand on his. His head was bent and he did not change his attitude. She sat down beside him without speaking; but their silences now were fertile as rain-clouds—they quickened the seeds of understanding.

At length he looked up. "I don't know," he said, "what spirits have come to live in the house of evil that I built—but you're there and that's enough. It's strange," he went on after another pause, "she wished the best for me so often, and now, at last, it's through her that it's come to me. But for her I shouldn't have known you—it's through her that I've found you. Sometimes—do you know?—that makes it hardest— makes me most intolerable to myself. Can't you see that it's the worst thing I've got to face? I sometimes think I could have borne it better if you hadn't understood! I took everything from her—everything—even to the poor shelter of loyalty she'd trusted in—the only thing I *could* have left her!—I took everything from her, I deceived her, I despoiled her, I destroyed her—and she's given me *you* in return!"

His wife's cry caught him up. "It isn't that she's given *me* to you—it is that she's given you to yourself." She leaned to him as though swept forward on a wave of pity. "Don't you see," she went on, as his eyes hung on her, "that that's the gift you can't escape from, the debt you're pledged to acquit? Don't you see that you've never before been what she thought you, and that now, so wonderfully, she's made you into the man she loved? *That's* worth suffering for, worth dying for, to a woman—that's the gift she would have wished to give!"

"Ah," he cried, "but woe to him by whom it cometh. What did I ever give her?"

"The happiness of giving," she said.

The Duchess at Prayer

HAVE you ever questioned the long shuttered front of an old Italian house, that motionless mask, smooth, mute, equivocal as the face of a priest behind which buzz the secrets of the confessional? Other houses declare the activities they shelter; they are the clear expressive cuticle of a life flowing close to the surface; but the old palace in its narrow street, the villa on its cypress-hooded hill, are as impenetrable as death. The tall windows are like blind eyes, the great door is a shut mouth. Inside there may be sunshine, the scent of myrtles, and a pulse of life through all the arteries of the huge frame; or a mortal solitude, where bats lodge in the disjointed stones and the keys rust in unused doors. . .

II

From the loggia, with its vanishing frescoes, I looked down an avenue barred by a ladder of cypress-shadows to the ducal escutcheon and multilated vases of the gate. Flat noon lay on the gardens, on fountains, porticoes and grottoes. Below the terrace, where a chrome-colored lichen had sheeted the balustrade as with fine *laminae* of gold, vineyards stooped to the rich valley clasped in hills. The lower slopes were strewn with white villages like stars spangling a summer dusk; and beyond these, fold on fold of blue mountain, clear as gauze against the sky. The August air was lifeless, but it seemed light and vivifying after the atmosphere of the shrouded rooms through which I had been led. Their chill was on me and I hugged the sunshine.

"The Duchess's apartments are beyond," said the old man.

He was the oldest man I had ever seen; so sucked back into the past that he seemed more like a memory than a living being. The one trait linking him with the actual was the fixity with which his small saurian eye held the pocket that, as I entered, had yielded a *lira* to the gate-keeper's child. He went on, without removing his eye:

"For two hundred years nothing has been changed in the apartments of the Duchess."

"And no one lives here now?"

"No one, sir. The Duke goes to Como for the summer season."

I had moved to the other end of the loggia. Below me, through hanging groves, white roofs and domes flashed like a smile.

"And that's Vicenza?"

"*Proprio!*" The old man extended fingers as lean as the hands fading from the walls behind us. "You see the palace roof over there, just to the left of the Basilica? The one with the row of statues like birds taking flight? That's the Duke's town palace, built by Palladio."

"And does the Duke come there?"

"Never. In winter he goes to Rome."

"And the palace and the villa are always closed?"

"As you see—always."

"How long has this been?"

"Since I can remember."

I looked into his eyes: they were like tarnished metal mirrors reflecting nothing. "That must be a long time," I said involuntarily.

"A long time," he assented.

I looked down on the gardens. An opulence of dahlias overran the box-borders, between cypresses that cut the sunshine like basalt shafts. Bees hung above the lavender; lizards sunned themselves on the benches and slipped through the cracks of the dry basins. Everywhere were vanishing traces of that fantastic horticulture of which our dull age has lost the art. Down the alleys maimed statues stretched their arms like rows of whining beggars; faun-eared terms

grinned in the thickets, and above the laurustinus walls rose the mock ruin of a temple, falling into real ruin in the bright disintegrating air. The glare was blinding.

"Let us go in," I said.

The old man pushed open a heavy door, behind which the cold lurked like a knife.

"The Duchess's apartments," he said.

Overhead and around us the same evanescent frescoes, under foot the same scagliola volutes, unrolled themselves interminably. Ebony cabinets, with inlay of precious marbles in cunning perspective, alternated down the room with the tarnished efflorescence of gilt consoles supporting Chinese monsters; and from the chimney-panel a gentleman in the Spanish habit haughtily ignored us.

"Duke Ercole II.," the old man explained, "by the Genoese Priest."

It was a narrow-browed face, sallow as a wax effigy, high-nosed and cautious-lidded, as though modelled by priestly hands; the lips weak and vain rather than cruel; a quibbling mouth that would have snapped at verbal errors like a lizard catching flies, but had never learned the shape of a round yes or no. One of the Duke's hands rested on the head of a dwarf, a simian creature with pearl ear-rings and fantastic dress; the other turned the pages of a folio propped on a skull.

"Beyond is the Duchess's bedroom," the old man reminded me.

Here the shutters admitted but two narrow shafts of light, gold bars deepening the subaqueous gloom. On a dais the bedstead, grim, nuptial, official, lifted its baldachin; a yellow Christ agonized between the curtains, and across the room a lady smiled at us from the chimney-breast.

The old man unbarred a shutter and the light touched her face. Such a face it was, with a flicker of laughter over it like the wind on a June meadow, and a singular tender pliancy of mien, as though one of Tiepolo's lenient goddesses had been busked into the stiff sheath of a seventeenth century dress!

"No one has slept here," said the old man, "since the Duchess Violante."

"And she was—?"

"The lady there—first Duchess of Duke Ercole II."

He drew a key from his pocket and unlocked a door at the farther end of the room. "The chapel," he said. "This is the Duchess's balcony." As I turned to follow him the Duchess tossed me a sidelong smile.

I stepped into a grated tribune above a chapel festooned with stucco. Pictures of bituminous saints mouldered between the pilasters; the artificial roses in the altar-vases were gray with dust and age, and under the cobwebby rosettes of the vaulting a bird's nest clung. Before the altar stood a row of tattered arm-chairs, and I drew back at sight of a figure kneeling near them.

"The Duchess," the old man whispered. "By the Cavaliere Bernini."

It was the image of a woman in furred robes and spreading fraise, her hand lifted, her face addressed to the tabernacle. There was a strangeness in the sight of that immovable presence locked in prayer before an abandoned shrine. Her face was hidden, and I wondered whether it were grief or gratitude that raised her hands and drew her eyes to the altar, where no living prayer joined her marble invocation. I followed my guide down the tribune steps, impatient to see what mystic version of such terrestrial graces the ingenious artist had found—the Cavaliere was master of such arts. The Duchess's attitude was one of transport, as though heavenly airs fluttered her laces and the love-locks escaping from her coif. I saw how admirably the sculptor had caught the poise of her head, the tender slope of the shoulder; then I crossed over and looked into her face—it was a frozen horror. Never have hate, revolt and agony so possessed a human countenance. . .

The old man crossed himself and shuffled his feet on the marble.

"The Duchess Violante," he repeated.

"The same as in the picture?"

“Eh—the same.”

“But the face—what does it mean?”

He shrugged his shoulders and turned deaf eyes on me. Then he shot a glance round the sepulchral place, clutched my sleeve and said, close to my ear: “It was not always so.”

“What was not?”

“The face—so terrible.”

“The Duchess’s face?”

“The statue’s. It changed after—”

“After?”

“It was put here.”

“The statue’s face *changed*—?”

He mistook my bewilderment for incredulity and his confidential finger dropped from my sleeve. “Eh, that’s the story. I tell what I’ve heard. What do I know?” He resumed his senile shuffle across the marble. “This is a bad place to stay in—no one comes here. It’s too cold. But the gentleman said, *I must see everything!*”

I let the *lire* sound. “So I must—and hear everything. This story, now—from whom did you have it?”

His hand stole back. “One that saw it, by God!”

“That saw it?”

“My grandmother, then. I’m a very old man.”

“Your grandmother? Your grandmother was—?”

“The Duchess’s serving girl, with respect to you.”

“Your grandmother? Two hundred years ago?”

“Is it too long ago? That’s as God pleases. I am a very old man and she was a very old woman when I was born. When she died she was as black as a miraculous Virgin and her breath whistled like the wind in a keyhole. She told me the story when I was a little boy. She told it to me out there in the garden, on a bench by the fish-pond, one summer night of the year she died. It must be true, for I can show you the very bench we sat on. . .”

III

Noon lay heavier on the gardens; not our live humming warmth but the stale exhalation of dead summers. The very statues seemed to drowse like watchers by a death-bed. Lizards shot out of the cracked soil like flames and the bench in the laurustinus-niche was strewn with the blue varnished bodies of dead flies. Before us lay the fish-pond, a yellow marble slab above rotting secrets. The villa looked across it, composed as a dead face, with the cypresses flanking it for candles. . .

IV

.

"Impossible, you say, that my mother's mother should have been the Duchess's maid? What do I know? It is so long since anything has happened here that the old things seem nearer, perhaps, than to those who live in cities. . . But how else did she know about the statue then? Answer me that, sir! That she saw with her eyes, I can swear to, and never smiled again, so she told me, till they put her first child in her arms . . . for she was taken to wife by the steward's son, Antonio, the same who had carried the letters. . . But where am I? Ah, well . . . she was a mere slip, you understand, my grandmother, when the Duchess died, a niece of the upper maid, Nencia, and suffered about the Duchess because of her pranks and the funny songs she knew. It's possible, you think, she may have heard from others what she afterward fancied she had seen herself? How that is, it's not for an unlettered man to say; though indeed I myself seem to have seen many of the things she told me. This is a strange place. No one comes here, nothing changes, and the old memories stand up as distinct as the statues in the garden. . .

"It began the summer after they came back from the Brenta. Duke Ercole had married the lady from Venice, you must know; it was a gay city, then, I'm told, with laughter and music on the water, and the days slipped by like boats running with the tide. Well, to humor

her he took her back the first autumn to the Brenta. Her father, it appears, had a grand palace there, with such gardens, bowling-alleys, grottoes and casinos as never were; gondolas bobbing at the water-gates, a stable full of gilt coaches, a theatre full of players, and kitchens and offices full of cooks and lackeys to serve up chocolate all day long to the fine ladies in masks and furbelows, with their pet dogs and their blackamoors and their *abates*. Eh! I know it all as if I'd been there, for Nencia, you see, my grandmother's aunt, travelled with the Duchess, and came back with her eyes round as platters, and not a word to say for the rest of the year to any of the lads who'd courted her here in Vicenza.

"What happened there I don't know—my grandmother could never get at the rights of it, for Nencia was mute as a fish where her lady was concerned—but when they came back to Vicenza the Duke ordered the villa set in order; and in the spring he brought the Duchess here and left her. She looked happy enough, my grandmother said, and seemed no object for pity. Perhaps, after all, it was better than being shut up in Vicenza, in the tall painted rooms where priests came and went as softly as cats prowling for birds, and the Duke was forever closeted in his library, talking with learned men. The Duke was a scholar; you noticed he was painted with a book? Well, those that can read 'em make out that they're full of wonderful things; as a man that's been to a fair across the mountains will always tell his people at home it was beyond anything *they'll* ever see. As for the Duchess, she was all for music, play-acting and young company. The Duke was a silent man, stepping quietly, with his eyes down, as though he'd just come from confession; when the Duchess's lap-dog yapped at his heels he danced like a man in a swarm of hornets; when the Duchess laughed he winced as if you'd drawn a diamond across a window-pane. And the Duchess was always laughing.

"When she first came to the villa she was very busy laying out the gardens, designing grottoes, planting groves and planning all manner

of agreeable surprises in the way of water-jets that drenched you unexpectedly, and hermits in caves, and wild men that jumped at you out of thickets. She had a very pretty taste in such matters, but after a while she tired of it, and there being no one for her to talk to but her maids and the chaplain—a clumsy man deep in his books—why, she would have strolling players out from Vicenza, mountebanks and fortune-tellers from the market-place, travelling doctors and astrologers, and all manner of trained animals. Still it could be seen that the poor lady pined for company, and her waiting women, who loved her, were glad when the Cavaliere Ascanio, the Duke's cousin, came to live at the vineyard across the valley—you see the pinkish house over there in the mulberries, with a red roof and a pigeon-cote?

“The Cavaliere Ascanio was a cadet of one of the great Venetian houses, *pezzi grossi* of the Golden Book. He had been meant for the Church, I believe, but what! he set fighting above praying and cast in his lot with the captain of the Duke of Mantua's *bravi*, himself a Venetian of good standing, but a little at odds with the law. Well, the next I know, the Cavaliere was in Venice again, perhaps not in good odor on account of his connection with the gentleman I speak of. Some say he tried to carry off a nun from the convent of Santa Croce; how that may be I can't say; but my grandmother declared he had enemies there, and the end of it was that on some pretext or other the Ten banished him to Vicenza. There, of course, the Duke, being his kinsman, had to show him a civil face; and that was how he first came to the villa.

“He was a fine young man, beautiful as a Saint Sebastian, a rare musician, who sang his own songs to the lute in a way that used to make my grandmother's heart melt and run through her body like mulled wine. He had a good word for everybody, too, and was always dressed in the French fashion, and smelt as sweet as a bean-field; and every soul about the place welcomed the sight of him.

“Well, the Duchess, it seemed, welcomed it too; youth will have

youth, and laughter turns to laughter; and the two matched each other like the candlesticks on an altar. The Duchess—you've seen her portrait—but to hear my grandmother, sir, it no more approached her than a weed comes up to a rose. The Cavaliere, indeed, as became a poet, paragoned her in his song to all the pagan goddesses of antiquity; and doubtless these were finer to look at than mere women; but so, it seemed, was she; for, to believe my grandmother, she made other women look no more than the big French fashion-doll that used to be shown on Ascension days in the Piazza. She was one, at any rate, that needed no outlandish finery to beautify her; whatever dress she wore became her as feathers fit the bird; and her hair didn't get its color by bleaching on the house-top. It glittered of itself like the threads in an Easter chasuble, and her skin was whiter than fine wheaten bread and her mouth as sweet as a ripe fig. . .

“Well, sir, you could no more keep them apart than the bees and the lavender. They were always together, singing, bowling, playing cup and ball, walking in the gardens, visiting the aviaries and petting her grace's trick-dogs and monkeys. The Duchess was as gay as a foal, always playing pranks and laughing, tricking out her animals like comedians, disguising herself as a peasant or a nun (you should have seen her one day pass herself off to the chaplain as a mendicant sister), or teaching the lads and girls of the vineyards to dance and sing madrigals together. The Cavaliere had a singular ingenuity in planning such entertainments and the days were hardly long enough for their diversions. But toward the end of the summer the Duchess fell quiet and would hear only sad music, and the two sat much together in the gazebo at the end of the garden. It was there the Duke found them one day when he drove out from Vicenza in his gilt coach. He came but once or twice a year to the villa, and it was, as my grandmother said, just a part of her poor lady's ill-luck to be wearing that day the Venetian habit, which uncovered the shoulders in a way the Duke always scowled at, and her curls loose and powdered with gold. Well, the three drank chocolate in the gazebo,

and what happened no one knew, except that the Duke, on taking leave, gave his cousin a seat in his carriage; but the Cavaliere never returned.

“Winter approaching, and the poor lady thus finding herself once more alone, it was surmised among her women that she must fall into a deeper depression of spirits. But far from this being the case, she displayed such cheerfulness and equanimity of humor that my grandmother, for one, was half-vexed with her for giving no more thought to the poor young man who, all this time, was eating his heart out in the house across the valley. It is true she quitted her gold-laced gowns and wore a veil over her head; but Nencia would have it she looked the lovelier for the change and so gave the Duke greater displeasure. Certain it is that the Duke drove out oftener to the villa, and though he found his lady always engaged in some innocent pursuit, such as embroidery or music, or playing games with her young women, yet he always went away with a sour look and a whispered word to the chaplain. Now as to the chaplain, my grandmother owned there had been a time when her grace had not handled him overwisely. For, according to Nencia, it seems that his reverence, who seldom approached the Duchess, being buried in his library like a mouse in a cheese—well, one day he made bold to appeal to her for a sum of money, a large sum, Nencia said, to buy certain tall books, a chest full of them, that a foreign pedlar had brought him; whereupon the Duchess, who could never abide a book, breaks out at him with a laugh and a flash of her old spirit—‘Holy Mother of God, must I have more books about me? I was nearly smothered with them in the first year of my marriage;’ and the chaplain turning red at the affront, she added: ‘You may buy them and welcome, my good chaplain, if you can find the money; but as for me, I am yet seeking a way to pay for my turquoise necklace, and the statue of Daphne at the end of the bowling-green, and the Indian parrot that my black boy brought me last Michaelmas from the Bohemians—so you see I’ve no money to waste on trifles;’ and as he

backs out awkwardly she tosses at him over her shoulder: 'You should pray to Saint Blandina to open the Duke's pocket!' to which he returned, very quietly, 'Your excellency's suggestion is an admirable one, and I have already entreated that blessed martyr to open the Duke's understanding.'

"Thereat, Nencia said (who was standing by), the Duchess flushed wonderfully red and waved him out of the room; and then 'Quick!' she cried to my grandmother (who was too glad to run on such errands), 'Call me Antonio, the gardener's boy, to the box-garden; I've a word to say to him about the new clove-carnations. . .'

"Now I may not have told you, sir, that in the crypt under the chapel there has stood, for more generations than a man can count, a stone coffin containing a thigh-bone of the blessed Saint Blandina of Lyons, a relic offered, I've been told, by some great Duke of France to one of our own dukes when they fought the Turk together; and the object, ever since, of particular veneration in this illustrious family. Now, since the Duchess had been left to herself, it was observed she affected a fervent devotion to this relic, praying often in the chapel and even causing the stone slab that covered the entrance to the crypt to be replaced by a wooden one, that she might at will descend and kneel by the coffin. This was matter of edification to all the household and should have been peculiarly pleasing to the chaplain; but, with respect to you, he was the kind of man who brings a sour mouth to the eating of the sweetest apple.

"However that may be, the Duchess, when she dismissed him, was seen running to the garden, where she talked earnestly with the boy Antonio about the new clove-carnations; and the rest of the day she sat indoors and played sweetly on the virginal. Now Nencia always had it in mind that her grace had made a mistake in refusing that request of the chaplain's; but she said nothing, for to talk reason to the Duchess was of no more use than praying for rain in a drought.

"Winter came early that year, there was snow on the hills by All Souls, the wind stripped the gardens, and the lemon-trees were

nipped in the lemon-house. The Duchess kept her room in this black season, sitting over the fire, embroidering, reading books of devotion (which was a thing she had never done) and praying frequently in the chapel. As for the chaplain, it was a place he never set foot in but to say mass in the morning, with the Duchess overhead in the tribune, and the servants aching with rheumatism on the marble floor. The chaplain himself hated the cold, and galloped through the mass like a man with witches after him. The rest of the day he spent in his library, over a brazier, with his eternal books. . .

“You’ll wonder, sir, if I’m ever to get to the gist of the story; and I’ve gone slowly, I own, for fear of what’s coming. Well, the winter was long and hard. When it fell cold the Duke ceased to come out from Vicenza, and not a soul had the Duchess to speak to but her maid-servants and the gardeners about the place. Yet it was wonderful, my grandmother said, how she kept her brave colors and her spirits; only it was remarked that she prayed longer in the chapel, where a brazier was kept burning for her all day. When the young are denied their natural pleasures they turn often enough to religion; and it was a mercy, as my grandmother said, that she, who had scarce a live sinner to speak to, should take such comfort in a dead saint.

“My grandmother seldom saw her that winter, for though she showed a brave front to all she kept more and more to herself, choosing to have only Nencia about her and dismissing even her when she went to pray. For her devotion had that mark of true piety, that she wished it not to be observed; so that Nencia had strict orders, on the chaplain’s approach, to warn her mistress if she happened to be in prayer.

“Well, the winter passed, and spring was well forward, when my grandmother one evening had a bad fright. That it was her own fault I won’t deny, for she’d been down the lime-walk with Antonio when her aunt fancied her to be stitching in her chamber; and seeing a sudden light in Nencia’s window, she took fright lest her

disobedience be found out, and ran up quickly through the laurel-grove to the house. Her way lay by the chapel, and as she crept past it, meaning to slip in through the scullery, and groping her way, for the dark had fallen and the moon was scarce up, she heard a crash close behind her, as though someone had dropped from a window of the chapel. The young fool's heart turned over, but she looked round as she ran, and there, sure enough, was a man scuttling across the terrace; and as he doubled the corner of the house my grandmother swore she caught the whisk of the chaplain's skirts. Now that was a strange thing, certainly; for why should the chaplain be getting out of the chapel window when he might have passed through the door? For you may have noticed, sir, there's a door leads from the chapel into the saloon on the ground floor; the only other way out being through the Duchess's tribune.

"Well, my grandmother turned the matter over, and next time she met Antonio in the lime-walk (which, by reason of her fright, was not for some days) she laid before him what had happened; but to her surprise he only laughed and said, 'You little simpleton, he wasn't getting out of the window, he was trying to look in'; and not another word could she get from him.

"So the season moved on to Easter, and news came the Duke had gone to Rome for that holy festivity. His comings and goings made no change at the villa, and yet there was no one there but felt easier to think his yellow face was on the far side of the Apennines, unless perhaps it was the chaplain.

"Well, it was one day in May that the Duchess, who had walked long with Nencia on the terrace, rejoicing at the sweetness of the prospect and the pleasant scent of the gillyflowers in the stone vases, the Duchess toward midday withdrew to her rooms, giving orders that her dinner should be served in her bed-chamber. My grandmother helped to carry in the dishes, and observed, she said, the singular beauty of the Duchess, who in honor of the fine weather had put on a gown of shot-silver and hung her bare shoulders with

pearls, so that she looked fit to dance at court with an emperor. She had ordered, too, a rare repast for a lady that heeded so little what she ate—jellies, game-pasties, fruits in syrup, spiced cakes and a flagon of Greek wine; and she nodded and clapped her hands as the women set it before her, saying again and again, ‘I shall eat well to-day.’

“But presently another mood seized her; she turned from the table, called for her rosary, and said to Nencia: ‘The fine weather has made me neglect my devotions. I must say a litany before I dine.’

“She ordered the women out and barred the door, as her custom was; and Nencia and my grandmother went downstairs to work in the linen-room.

“Now the linen-room gives on the court-yard, and suddenly my grandmother saw a strange sight approaching. First up the avenue came the Duke’s carriage (whom all thought to be in Rome), and after it, drawn by a long string of mules and oxen, a cart carrying what looked like a kneeling figure wrapped in death-clothes. The strangeness of it struck the girl dumb and the Duke’s coach was at the door before she had the wit to cry out that it was coming. Nencia, when she saw it, went white and ran out of the room. My grandmother followed, scared by her face, and the two fled along the corridor to the chapel. On the way they met the chaplain, deep in a book, who asked in surprise where they were running, and when they said, to announce the Duke’s arrival, he fell into such astonishment and asked them so many questions and uttered such ohs and ahs, that by the time he let them by the Duke was at their heels. Nencia reached the chapel-door first and cried out that the Duke was coming; and before she had a reply he was at her side, with the chaplain following.

“A moment later the door opened and there stood the Duchess. She held her rosary in one hand and had drawn a scarf over her shoulders; but they shone through it like the moon in a mist, and her countenance sparkled with beauty.

“The Duke took her hand with a bow. ‘Madam,’ he said, ‘I could have had no greater happiness than thus to surprise you at your devotions.’

“ ‘My own happiness,’ she replied, ‘would have been greater had your excellency prolonged it by giving me notice of your arrival.’

“ ‘Had you expected me, Madam,’ said he, ‘your appearance could scarcely have been more fitted to the occasion. Few ladies of your youth and beauty array themselves to venerate a saint as they would to welcome a lover.’

“ ‘Sir,’ she answered, ‘having never enjoyed the latter opportunity, I am constrained to make the most of the former.—What’s that?’ she cried, falling back, and the rosary dropped from her hand.

“There was a loud noise at the other end of the saloon, as of a heavy object being dragged down the passage; and presently a dozen men were seen haling across the threshold the shrouded thing from the ox-cart. The Duke waved his hand toward it. ‘That,’ said he, ‘Madam, is a tribute to your extraordinary piety. I have heard with peculiar satisfaction of your devotion to the blessed relics in this chapel, and to commemorate a zeal which neither the rigors of winter nor the sultriness of summer could abate I have ordered a sculptured image of you, marvellously executed by the Cavaliere Bernini, to be placed before the altar over the entrance to the crypt.’

“The Duchess, who had grown pale, nevertheless smiled playfully at this. ‘As to commemorating my piety,’ she said, ‘I recognize there one of your excellency’s pleasantries—’

“ ‘A pleantry?’ the Duke interrupted; and he made a sign to the men, who had now reached the threshold of the chapel. In an instant the wrappings fell from the figure, and there knelt the Duchess to the life. A cry of wonder rose from all, but the Duchess herself stood whiter than the marble.

“ ‘You will see,’ says the Duke, ‘this is no pleantry, but a triumph of the incomparable Bernini’s chisel. The likeness was done from your miniature portrait by the divine Elisabetta Sirani, which I sent

to the master some six months ago, with what results all must admire.'

" 'Six months!' cried the Duchess, and seemed about to fall; but his excellency caught her by the hand.

" 'Nothing,' he said, 'could better please me than the excessive emotion you display, for true piety is ever modest, and your thanks could not take a form that better became you. And now,' says he to the men, 'let the image be put in place.'

"By this, life seemed to have returned to the Duchess, and she answered him with a deep reverence. 'That I should be overcome by so unexpected a grace, your excellency admits to be natural; but what honors you accord it is my privilege to accept, and I entreat only that in mercy to my modesty the image be placed in the remotest part of the chapel.'

"At that the Duke darkened. 'What! You would have this masterpiece of a renowned chisel, which, I disguise not, cost me the price of a good vineyard in gold pieces, you would have it thrust out of sight like the work of a village stonecutter?'

" 'It is my semblance, not the sculptor's work, I desire to conceal.'

" 'If you are fit for my house, Madam, you are fit for God's, and entitled to the place of honor in both. Bring the statue forward, you dawdlers!' he called out to the men.

"The Duchess fell back submissively. 'You are right, sir, as always; but I would at least have the image stand on the left of the altar, that, looking up, it may behold your excellency's seat in the tribune.'

" 'A pretty thought, Madam, for which I thank you; but I design before long to put my companion image on the other side of the altar; and the wife's place, as you know, is at her husband's right hand.'

" 'True, my lord—but, again, if my poor presentment is to have the unmerited honor of kneeling beside yours, why not place both before the altar, where it is our habit to pray in life?'

" 'And where, Madam, should we kneel if they took our places?'

Besides,' says the Duke, still speaking very blandly, 'I have a more particular purpose in placing your image over the entrance to the crypt; for not only would I thereby mark your special devotion to the blessed saint who rests there, but, by sealing up the opening in the pavement, would assure the perpetual preservation of that holy martyr's bones, which hitherto have been too thoughtlessly exposed to sacrilegious attempts.'

" 'What attempts, my lord?' cries the Duchess. 'No one enters this chapel without my leave.'

" 'So I have understood, and can well believe from what I have learned of your piety; yet at night a malefactor might break in through a window, Madam, and your excellency not know it.'

" 'I'm a light sleeper,' said the Duchess.

"The Duke looked at her gravely. 'Indeed?' said he. 'A bad sign at your age. I must see that you are provided with a sleeping-draught.'

"The Duchess's eyes filled. 'You would deprive me, then, of the consolation of visiting those venerable relics?'

" 'I would have you keep eternal guard over them, knowing no one to whose care they may more fittingly be entrusted.'

"By this the image was brought close to the wooden slab that covered the entrance to the crypt, when the Duchess, springing forward, placed herself in the way.

" 'Sir, let the statue be put in place to-morrow, and suffer me, to-night, to say a last prayer beside those holy bones.'

"The Duke stepped instantly to her side. 'Well thought, Madam; I will go down with you now, and we will pray together.'

" 'Sir, your long absences have, alas! given me the habit of solitary devotion, and I confess that any presence is distracting.'

" 'Madam, I accept your rebuke. Hitherto, it is true, the duties of my station have constrained me to long absences; but henceforward I remain with you while you live. Shall we go down into the crypt together?'

" 'No; for I fear for your excellency's ague. The air there is

excessively damp.'

" 'The more reason you should no longer be exposed to it; and to prevent the intemperance of your zeal I will at once make the place inaccessible.'

"The Duchess at this fell on her knees on the slab, weeping excessively and lifting her hands to heaven.

" 'Oh,' she cried, 'you are cruel, sir, to deprive me of access to the sacred relics that have enabled me to support with resignation the solitude to which your excellency's duties have condemned me; and if prayer and meditation give me any authority to pronounce on such matters, suffer me to warn you, sir, that I fear the blessed Saint Blandina will punish us for thus abandoning her venerable remains!'

"The Duke at this seemed to pause, for he was a pious man, and my grandmother thought she saw him exchange a glance with the chaplain; who, stepping timidly forward, with his eyes on the ground, said, 'There is indeed much wisdom in her excellency's words, but I would suggest, sir, that her pious wish might be met, and the saint more conspicuously honored, by transferring the relics from the crypt to a place beneath the altar.'

" 'True!' cried the Duke, 'and it shall be done at once.' "

But thereat the Duchess rose to her feet with a terrible look.

" 'No,' she cried, 'by the body of God! For it shall not be said that, after your excellency has chosen to deny every request I addressed to him, I owe his consent to the solicitation of another!'

"The chaplain turned red and the Duke yellow, and for a moment neither spoke.

"Then the Duke said, 'Here are words enough, Madam. Do you wish the relics brought up from the crypt?'

" 'I wish nothing that I owe to another's intervention!'

" 'Put the image in place then,' says the Duke furiously; and handed her grace to a chair.

"She sat there, my grandmother said, straight as an arrow, her hands locked, her head high, her eyes on the Duke, while the statue

was dragged to its place; then she stood up and turned away. As she passed by Nencia, 'Call me Antonio,' she whispered; but before the words were out of her mouth the Duke stepped between them.

" 'Madam,' says he, all smiles now, 'I have travelled straight from Rome to bring you the sooner this proof of my esteem. I lay last night at Monselice and have been on the road since daybreak. Will you not invite me to supper?'

" 'Surely, my lord,' said the Duchess. 'It shall be laid in the dining-parlor within the hour.'

" 'Why not in your chamber and at once, Madam? Since I believe it is your custom to sup there.'

" 'In my chamber?' says the Duchess, in disorder.

" 'Have you anything against it?' he asked.

" 'Assuredly not, sir, if you will give me time to prepare myself.'

" 'I will wait in your cabinet,' said the Duke.

"At that, said my grandmother, the Duchess gave one look, as the souls in hell may have looked when the gates closed on our Lord; then she called Nencia and passed to her chamber.

"What happened there my grandmother could never learn, but that the Duchess, in great haste, dressed herself with extraordinary splendor, powdering her hair with gold, painting her face and bosom, and covering herself with jewels till she shone like our Lady of Loreto; and hardly were these preparations complete when the Duke entered from the cabinet, followed by the servants carrying supper. Thereupon the Duchess dismissed Nencia, and what follows my grandmother learned from a pantry-lad who brought up the dishes and waited in the cabinet; for only the Duke's body-servant entered the bed-chamber.

"Well, according to this boy, sir, who was looking and listening with his whole body, as it were, because he had never before been suffered so near the Duchess, it appears that the noble couple sat down in great good humor, the Duchess playfully reproving her husband for his long absence, while the Duke swore that to look so

beautiful was the best way of punishing him. In this tone the talk continued, with such gay sallies on the part of the Duchess, such tender advances on the Duke's, that the lad declared they were for all the world like a pair of lovers courting on a summer's night in the vineyard; and so it went till the servant brought in the mulled wine.

“ ‘Ah,’ the Duke was saying at that moment, ‘this agreeable evening repays me for the many dull ones I have spent away from you; nor do I remember to have enjoyed such laughter since the afternoon last year when we drank chocolate in the gazebo with my cousin Ascanio. And that reminds me,’ he said, ‘is my cousin in good health?’

“ ‘I have no reports of it,’ says the Duchess. ‘But your excellency should taste these figs stewed in malmsey—’

“ ‘I am in the mood to taste whatever you offer,’ said he; and as she helped him to the figs he added, ‘If my enjoyment were not complete as it is, I could almost wish my cousin Ascanio were with us. The fellow is rare good company at supper. What do you say, Madam? I hear he's still in the country; shall we send for him to join us?’

“ ‘Ah,’ said the Duchess, with a sigh and a languishing look, ‘I see your excellency wearies of me already.’

“ ‘I, Madam? Ascanio is a capital good fellow, but to my mind his chief merit at this moment is his absence. It inclines me so tenderly to him that, by God, I could empty a glass to his good health.’

“With that the Duke caught up his goblet and signed to the servant to fill the Duchess's.

“ ‘Here's to the cousin,’ he cried, standing, ‘who has the good taste to stay away when he's not wanted. I drink to his very long life—and you, Madam?’

“At this the Duchess, who had sat staring at him with a changed face, rose also and lifted her glass to her lips.

“ ‘And I to his happy death,’ says she in a wild voice; and as she spoke the empty goblet dropped from her hand and she fell face

down on the floor.

“The Duke shouted to her women that she had swooned, and they came and lifted her to the bed. . . She suffered horribly all night, Nencia said, twisting herself like a heretic at the stake, but without a word escaping her. The Duke watched her, and toward daylight sent for the chaplain; but by this she was unconscious and, her teeth being locked, our Lord’s body could not be passed through them.

.

“The Duke announced to his relations that his lady had died after partaking too freely of spiced wine and an omelet of carp’s roe, at a supper she had prepared in honor of his return; and the next year he brought home a new Duchess, who gave him a son and five daughters. . .”

V

The sky had turned to a steel gray, against which the villa stood out sallow and inscrutable. A wind strayed through the gardens, loosening here and there a yellow leaf from the sycamores; and the hills across the valley were purple as thunder-clouds.

.

“And the statue—?” I asked.

“Ah, the statue. Well, sir, this is what my grandmother told me, here on this very bench where we’re sitting. The poor child, who worshipped the Duchess as a girl of her years will worship a beautiful kind mistress, spent a night of horror, you may fancy, shut out from her lady’s room, hearing the cries that came from it, and seeing, as she crouched in her corner, the women rush to and fro with wild looks, the Duke’s lean face in the door, and the chaplain skulking in the antechamber with his eyes on his breviary. No one minded her that night or the next morning; and toward dusk, when it became known the Duchess was no more, the poor girl felt the pious wish to say a prayer for her dead mistress. She crept to the chapel and stole in unobserved. The place was empty and dim, but as she

advanced she heard a low moaning, and coming in front of the statue she saw that its face, the day before so sweet and smiling, had the look on it that you know—and the moaning seemed to come from its lips. My grandmother turned cold, but something, she said afterward, kept her from calling or shrieking out, and she turned and ran from the place. In the passage she fell in a swoon; and when she came to her senses, in her own chamber, she heard that the Duke had locked the chapel door and forbidden any to set foot there. . . The place was never opened again till the Duke died, some ten years later; and then it was that the other servants, going in with the new heir, saw for the first time the horror that my grandmother had kept in her bosom. . .”

“And the crypt?” I asked. “Has it never been opened?”

“Heaven forbid, sir!” cried the old man, crossing himself. “Was it not the Duchess’s express wish that the relics should not be disturbed?”

The Angel at the Grave

THE HOUSE stood a few yards back from the elm-shaded village street, in that semi-publicity sometimes cited as a democratic protest against old-world standards of domestic exclusiveness. This candid exposure to the public eye is more probably a result of the gregariousness which, in the New England bosom, oddly coexists with a shrinking from direct social contact; most of the inmates of such houses preferring that furtive intercourse which is the result of observations through shuttered windows and a categorical acquaintance with the neighboring clothes-lines. The House, however, faced its public with a difference. For sixty years it had written itself with a capital letter, had self-consciously squared itself in the eye of an admiring nation. The most searching inroads of village intimacy hardly counted in a household that opened on the universe; and a lady whose door-bell was at any moment liable to be rung by visitors from London or Vienna was not likely to flutter upstairs when she observed a neighbor "stepping over."

The solitary inmate of the Anson House owed this induration of the social texture to the most conspicuous accident in her annals: the fact that she was the only granddaughter of the great Orestes Anson. She had been born, as it were, into a museum, and cradled in a glass case with a label; the first foundations of her consciousness being built on the rock of her grandfather's celebrity. To a little girl who acquires her earliest knowledge of literature through a *Reader* embellished with fragments of her ancestor's prose, that personage necessarily fills an heroic space in the foreground of life. To

communicate with one's past through the impressive medium of print, to have, as it were, a footing in every library in the country, and an acknowledged kinship with that world-diffused clan, the descendants of the great, was to be pledged to a standard of manners that amazingly simplified the lesser relations of life. The village street on which Paulina Anson's youth looked out led to all the capitals of Europe; and over the roads of intercommunication unseen caravans bore back to the elm-shaded House the tribute of an admiring world.

Fate seemed to have taken a direct share in fitting Paulina for her part as the custodian of this historic dwelling. It had long been secretly regarded as a "visitation" by the great man's family that he had left no son and that his daughters were not "intellectual." The ladies themselves were the first to lament their deficiency, to own that nature had denied them the gift of making the most of their opportunities. A profound veneration for their parent and an unswerving faith in his doctrines had not amended their congenital incapacity to understand what he had written. Laura, who had her moments of mute rebellion against destiny, had sometimes thought how much easier it would have been if their progenitor had been a poet; for she could recite, with feeling, portions of *The Culprit Fay* and of the poems of Mrs. Hemans; and Phoebe, who was more conspicuous for memory than imagination, kept an album filled with "selections." But the great man was a philosopher; and to both daughters respiration was difficult on the cloudy heights of metaphysic. The situation would have been intolerable but for the fact that, while Phoebe and Laura were still at school, their father's fame had passed from the open ground of conjecture to the chill privacy of certitude. Dr. Anson had in fact achieved one of those anticipated immortalities not uncommon at a time when people were apt to base their literary judgments on their emotions, and when to affect plain food and despise England went a long way toward establishing a man's intellectual pre-eminence. Thus, when the

daughters were called on to strike a filial attitude about their parent's pedestal, there was little to do but to pose gracefully and point upward; and there are spines to which the immobility of worship is not a strain. A legend had by this time crystallized about the great Orestes, and it was of more immediate interest to the public to hear what brand of tea he drank, and whether he took off his boots in the hall, than to rouse the drowsy echo of his dialectic. A great man never draws so near his public as when it has become unnecessary to read his books and is still interesting to know what he eats for breakfast.

As recorders of their parent's domestic habits, as pious scavengers of his waste-paper basket, the Misses Anson were unexcelled. They always had an interesting anecdote to impart to the literary pilgrim, and the tact with which, in later years, they intervened between the public and the growing inaccessibility of its idol, sent away many an enthusiast satisfied to have touched the veil before the sanctuary. Still it was felt, especially by old Mrs. Anson, who survived her husband for some years, that Phoebe and Laura were not worthy of their privileges. There had been a third daughter so unworthy of hers that she had married a distant cousin, who had taken her to live in a new Western community where the *Works of Orestes Anson* had not yet become a part of the civic consciousness; but of this daughter little was said, and she was tacitly understood to be excluded from the family heritage of fame. In time, however, it appeared that the traditional penny with which she had been cut off had been invested to unexpected advantage; and the interest on it, when she died, returned to the Anson House in the shape of a granddaughter who was at once felt to be what Mrs. Anson called a "compensation." It was Mrs. Anson's firm belief that the remotest operations of nature were governed by the centripetal force of her husband's greatness and that Paulina's exceptional intelligence could be explained only on the ground that she was designed to act as the guardian of the family temple.

The House, by the time Paulina came to live in it, had already acquired the publicity of a place of worship; not the perfumed chapel of a romantic idolatry but the cold clean empty meeting-house of ethical enthusiasms. The ladies lived on its outskirts, as it were, in cells that left the central fane undisturbed. The very position of the furniture had come to have a ritual significance: the sparse ornaments were the offerings of kindred intellects, the steel engravings by Raphael Morghen marked the Via Sacra of a European tour, and the black-walnut desk with its bronze ink-stand modelled on the Pantheon was the altar of this bleak temple of thought.

To a child compact of enthusiasms, and accustomed to pasture them on the scanty herbage of a new social soil, the atmosphere of the old house was full of floating nourishment. In the compressed perspective of Paulina's outlook it stood for a monument of ruined civilizations, and its white portico opened on legendary distances. Its very aspect was impressive to eyes that had first surveyed life from the jig-saw "residence" of a raw-edged Western town. The high-ceilinged rooms, with their panelled walls, the polished mahogany, their portraits of triple-stocked ancestors and of ringleted "females" in crayon, furnished the child with the historic scenery against which a young imagination constructs its vision of the past. To other eyes the cold spotless thinly-furnished interior might have suggested the shuttered mind of a maiden-lady who associates fresh air and sunlight with dust and discoloration; but it is the eye which supplies the coloring-matter, and Paulina's brimmed with the richest hues.

Nevertheless, the House did not immediately dominate her. She had her confused out-reachings toward other centres of sensation, her vague intuition of a heliocentric system; but the attraction of habit, the steady pressure of example, gradually fixed her roving allegiance and she bent her neck to the yoke. Vanity had a share in her subjugation; for it had early been discovered that she was the only person in the family who could read her grandfather's works. The fact that she had perused them with delight at an age when

(even presupposing a metaphysical bias) it was impossible for her to understand them, seemed to her aunts and grandmother sure evidence of predestination. Paulina was to be the interpreter of the oracle, and the philosophic fumes so vertiginous to meaner minds would throw her into the needed condition of clairvoyance. Nothing could have been more genuine than the emotion on which this theory was based. Paulina, in fact, delighted in her grandfather's writings. His sonorous periods, his mystic vocabulary, his bold flights into the rarefied air of the abstract, were thrilling to a fancy unhampered by the need of definitions. This purely verbal pleasure was supplemented later by the excitement of gathering up crumbs of meaning from the rhetorical board. What could have been more stimulating than to construct the theory of a girlish world out of the fragments of this Titanic cosmogony? Before Paulina's opinions had reached the stage when ossification sets in their form was fatally predetermined.

The fact that Dr. Anson had died and that his apotheosis had taken place before his young priestess's induction to the temple, made her ministrations easier and more inspiring. There were no little personal traits—such as the great man's manner of helping himself to salt, or the guttural cluck that started the wheels of speech—to distract the eye of young veneration from the central fact of his divinity. A man whom one knows only through a crayon portrait and a dozen yellowing tomes on free-will and intuition is at least secure from the belittling effects of intimacy.

Paulina thus grew up in a world readjusted to the fact of her grandfather's greatness; and as each organism draws from its surroundings the kind of nourishment most needful to its growth, so from this somewhat colorless conception she absorbed warmth, brightness and variety. Paulina was the type of woman who transmutes thought into sensation and nurses a theory in her bosom like a child.

In due course Mrs. Anson "passed away"—no one died in the

Anson vocabulary—and Paulina became more than ever the foremost figure of the commemorative group. Laura and Phoebe, content to leave their father's glory in more competent hands, placidly lapsed into needlework and fiction, and their niece stepped into immediate prominence as the chief "authority" on the great man. Historians who were "getting up" the period wrote to consult her and to borrow documents; ladies with inexplicable yearnings begged for an interpretation of phrases which had "influenced" them, but which they had not quite understood; critics applied to her to verify some doubtful citation or to decide some disputed point in chronology; and the great tide of thought and investigation kept up a continuous murmur on the quiet shores of her life.

An explorer of another kind disembarked there one day in the shape of a young man to whom Paulina was primarily a kissable girl, with an after-thought in the shape of a grandfather. From the outset it had been impossible to fix Hewlett Winsloe's attention on Dr. Anson. The young man behaved with the innocent profanity of infants sporting on a tomb. His excuse was that he came from New York, a Cimmerian outskirt which survived in Paulina's geography only because Dr. Anson had gone there once or twice to lecture. The curious thing was that she should have thought it worth while to find excuses for young Winsloe. The fact that she did so had not escaped the attention of the village; but people, after a gasp of awe, said it was the most natural thing in the world that a girl like Paulina Anson should think of marrying. It would certainly seem a little odd to see a man in the House, but young Winsloe would of course understand that the Doctor's books were not to be disturbed, and that he must go down to the orchard to smoke—. The village had barely framed this *modus vivendi* when it was convulsed by the announcement that young Winsloe declined to live in the House on any terms. Hang going down to the orchard to smoke! He meant to take his wife to New York. The village drew its breath and watched.

Did Persephone, snatched from the warm fields of Enna, peer half-

consentingly down the abyss that opened at her feet? Paulina, it must be owned, hung a moment over the black gulf of temptation. She would have found it easy to cope with a deliberate disregard of her grandfather's rights; but young Winsloe's unconsciousness of that shadowy claim was as much a natural function as the falling of leaves on a grave. His love was an embodiment of the perpetual renewal which to some tender spirits seems a crueller process than decay.

On women of Paulina's mould this piety toward implicit demands, toward the ghosts of dead duties walking unappeased among usurping passions, has a stronger hold than any tangible bond. People said that she gave up young Winsloe because her aunts disapproved of her leaving them; but such disapproval as reached her was an emanation from the walls of the House, from the bare desk, the faded portraits, the dozen yellowing tomes that no hand but hers ever lifted from the shelf.

II

After that the House possessed her. As if conscious of its victory, it imposed a conqueror's claims. It had once been suggested that she should write a life of her grandfather, and the task from which she had shrunk as from a too-oppressive privilege now shaped itself into a justification of her course. In a burst of filial pantheism she tried to lose herself in the vast ancestral consciousness. Her one refuge from scepticism was a blind faith in the magnitude and the endurance of the idea to which she had sacrificed her life, and with a passionate instinct of self-preservation she labored to fortify her position.

The preparations for the *Life* led her through by-ways that the most scrupulous of the previous biographers had left unexplored. She accumulated her material with a blind animal patience unconscious of fortuitous risks. The years stretched before her like some vast blank page spread out to receive the record of her toil; and she had a mystic conviction that she would not die till her work was

accomplished.

The aunts, sustained by no such high purpose, withdrew in turn to their respective divisions of the Anson “plot,” and Paulina remained alone with her tasks. She was forty when the book was completed. She had travelled little in her life, and it had become more and more difficult to her to leave the House even for a day; but the dread of entrusting her document to a strange hand made her decide to carry it herself to the publisher. On the way to Boston she had a sudden vision of the loneliness to which this last parting condemned her. All her youth, all her dreams, all her renunciations lay in that neat bundle on her knee. It was not so much her grandfather’s life as her own that she had written; and the knowledge that it would come back to her in all the glorification of print was of no more help than, to a mother’s grief, the assurance that the lad she must part with will return with epaulets.

She had naturally addressed herself to the firm which had published her grandfather’s works. Its founder, a personal friend of the philosopher’s, had survived the Olympian group of which he had been a subordinate member, long enough to bestow his octogenarian approval on Paulina’s pious undertaking. But he had died soon afterward; and Miss Anson found herself confronted by his grandson, a person with a brisk commercial view of his trade, who was said to have put “new blood” into the firm.

This gentleman listened attentively, fingering her manuscript as though literature were a tactile substance; then, with a confidential twist of his revolving chair, he emitted the verdict: “We ought to have had this ten years sooner.”

Miss Anson took the words as an allusion to the repressed avidity of her readers. “It has been a long time for the public to wait,” she solemnly assented.

The publisher smiled. “They haven’t waited,” he said.

She looked at him strangely. “Haven’t waited?”

“No—they’ve gone off; taken another train. Literature’s like a big

railway-station now, you know: there's a train starting every minute. People are not going to hang round the waiting-room. If they can't get to a place when they want to they go somewhere else."

The application of this parable cost Miss Anson several minutes of throbbing silence. At length she said: "Then I am to understand that the public is no longer interested in—in my grandfather?" She felt as though heaven must blast the lips that risked such a conjecture.

"Well, it's this way. He's a name still, of course. People don't exactly want to be caught not knowing who he is; but they don't want to spend two dollars finding out, when they can look him up for nothing in any biographical dictionary."

Miss Anson's world reeled. She felt herself adrift among mysterious forces, and no more thought of prolonging the discussion than of opposing an earthquake with argument. She went home carrying the manuscript like a wounded thing. On the return journey she found herself travelling straight toward a fact that had lurked for months in the background of her life, and that now seemed to await her on the very threshold: the fact that fewer visitors came to the House. She owned to herself that for the last four or five years the number had steadily diminished. Engrossed in her work, she had noted the change only to feel thankful that she had fewer interruptions. There had been a time when, at the travelling season, the bell rang continuously, and the ladies of the House lived in a chronic state of "best silks" and expectancy. It would have been impossible then to carry on any consecutive work; and she now saw that the silence which had gathered round her task had been the hush of death.

Not of *his* death! The very walls cried out against the implication. It was the world's enthusiasm, the world's faith, the world's loyalty that had died. A corrupt generation that had turned aside to worship the brazen serpent. Her heart yearned with a prophetic passion over the lost sheep straying in the wilderness. But all great glories had their interlunar period; and in due time her grandfather would once more flash full-orbed upon a darkling world.

The few friends to whom she confided her adventure reminded her with tender indignation that there were other publishers less subject to the fluctuations of the market; but much as she had braved for her grandfather she could not again brave that particular probation. She found herself, in fact, incapable of any immediate effort. She had lost her way in a labyrinth of conjecture where her worst dread was that she might put her hand upon the clue.

She locked up the manuscript and sat down to wait. If a pilgrim had come just then the priestess would have fallen on his neck; but she continued to celebrate her rites alone. It was a double solitude; for she had always thought a great deal more of the people who came to see the House than of the people who came to see her. She fancied that the neighbors kept a keen eye on the path to the House; and there were days when the figure of a stranger strolling past the gate seemed to focus upon her the scorching sympathies of the village. For a time she thought of travelling; of going to Europe, or even to Boston; but to leave the House now would have seemed like deserting her post. Gradually her scattered energies centred themselves in the fierce resolve to understand what had happened. She was not the woman to live long in an unmapped country or to accept as final her private interpretation of phenomena. Like a traveller in unfamiliar regions she began to store for future guidance the minutest natural signs. Unflinchingly she noted the accumulating symptoms of indifference that marked her grandfather's descent toward posterity. She passed from the heights on which he had been grouped with the sages of his day to the lower level where he had come to be "the friend of Emerson," "the correspondent of Hawthorne," or (later still) "the Dr. Anson" mentioned in their letters. The change had taken place as slowly and imperceptibly as a natural process. She could not say that any ruthless hand had stripped the leaves from the tree: it was simply that, among the evergreen glories of his group, her grandfather's had proved deciduous.

She had still to ask herself why. If the decay had been a natural process, was it not the very pledge of renewal? It was easier to find such arguments than to be convinced by them. Again and again she tried to drug her solicitude with analogies; but at last she saw that such expedients were but the expression of a growing incredulity. The best way of proving her faith in her grandfather was not to be afraid of his critics. She had no notion where these shadowy antagonists lurked; for she had never heard of the great man's doctrine being directly combated. Oblique assaults there must have been, however, Parthian shots at the giant that none dared face; and she thirsted to close with such assailants. The difficulty was to find them. She began by re-reading the *Works*; thence she passed to the writers of the same school, those whose rhetoric bloomed perennial in *First Readers* from which her grandfather's prose had long since faded. Amid that clamor of far-off enthusiasms she detected no controversial note. The little knot of Olympians held their views in common with an early-Christian promiscuity. They were continually proclaiming their admiration for each other, the public joining as chorus in this guileless antiphon of praise; and she discovered no traitor in their midst.

What then had happened? Was it simply that the main current of thought had set another way? Then why did the others survive? Why were they still marked down as tributaries to the philosophic stream? This question carried her still farther afield, and she pressed on with the passion of a champion whose reluctance to know the worst might be construed into a doubt of his cause. At length—slowly but inevitably—an explanation shaped itself. Death had overtaken the doctrines about which her grandfather had draped his cloudy rhetoric. They had disintegrated and been re-absorbed, adding their little pile to the dust drifted about the mute lips of the Sphinx. The great man's contemporaries had survived not by reason of what they taught, but of what they were; and he, who had been the mere mask through which they mouthed their lesson, the instrument on which

their tune was played, lay buried deep among the obsolete tools of thought.

The discovery came to Paulina suddenly. She looked up one evening from her reading and it stood before her like a ghost. It had entered her life with stealthy steps, creeping close before she was aware of it. She sat in the library, among the carefully-tended books and portraits; and it seemed to her that she had been walled alive into a tomb hung with the effigies of dead ideas. She felt a desperate longing to escape into the outer air, where people toiled and loved, and living sympathies went hand in hand. It was the sense of wasted labor that oppressed her; of two lives consumed in that ruthless process that uses generations of effort to build a single cell. There was a dreary parallel between her grandfather's fruitless toil and her own unprofitable sacrifice. Each in turn had kept vigil by a corpse.

III

The bell rang—she remembered it afterward—with a loud thrilling note. It was what they used to call the “visitor's ring”; not the tentative tinkle of a neighbor dropping in to borrow a sauce-pan or discuss parochial incidents, but a decisive summons from the outer world.

Miss Anson put down her knitting and listened. She sat upstairs now, making her rheumatism an excuse for avoiding the rooms below. Her interests had insensibly adjusted themselves to the perspective of her neighbors' lives, and she wondered—as the bell re-echoed—if it could mean that Mrs. Heminway's baby had come. Conjecture had time to ripen into certainty, and she was limping toward the closet where her cloak and bonnet hung, when her little maid fluttered in with the announcement: “A gentleman to see the house.”

“*The House?*”

“Yes, m'm. I don't know what he means,” faltered the messenger, whose memory did not embrace the period when such

announcements were a daily part of the domestic routine.

Miss Anson glanced at the proffered card. The name it bore—*Mr. George Corby*—was unknown to her, but the blood rose to her languid cheek. “Hand me my Mechlin cap, Katy,” she said, trembling a little, as she laid aside her walking stick. She put her cap on before the mirror, with rapid unsteady touches. “Did you draw up the library blinds?” she breathlessly asked.

She had gradually built up a wall of commonplace between herself and her illusions, but at the first summons of the past filial passion swept away the frail barriers of expediency.

She walked down-stairs so hurriedly that her stick clicked like a girlish heel; but in the hall she paused, wondering nervously if Katy had put a match to the fire. The autumn air was cold and she had the reproachful vision of a visitor with elderly ailments shivering by her inhospitable hearth. She thought instinctively of the stranger as a survivor of the days when such a visit was a part of the young enthusiast’s itinerary.

The fire was unlit and the room forbiddingly cold; but the figure which, as Miss Anson entered, turned from a lingering scrutiny of the book-shelves, was that of a fresh-eyed sanguine youth clearly independent of any artificial caloric. She stood still a moment, feeling herself the victim of some anterior impression that made this robust presence an insubstantial thing; but the young man advanced with an air of genial assurance which rendered him at once more real and more reminiscent.

“Why this, you know,” he exclaimed, “is simply immense!”

The words, which did not immediately present themselves as slang to Miss Anson’s unaccustomed ear, echoed with an odd familiarity through the academic silence.

“The room, you know, I mean,” he explained with a comprehensive gesture. “These jolly portraits, and the books—that’s the old gentleman himself over the mantelpiece, I suppose?—and the elms outside, and—and the whole business. I do like a congruous

background—don't you?"

His hostess was silent. No one but Hewlett Winsloe had ever spoken of her grandfather as "the old gentleman."

"It's a hundred times better than I could have hoped," her visitor continued, with a cheerful disregard of her silence. "The seclusion, the remoteness, the philosophic atmosphere—there's so little of that kind of flavor left! I should have simply hated to find that he lived over a grocery, you know.—I had the deuce of a time finding out where he *did* live," he began again, after another glance of parenthetical enjoyment. "But finally I got on the trail through some old book on Brook Farm. I was bound I'd get the environment right before I did my article."

Miss Anson, by this time, had recovered sufficient self-possession to seat herself and assign a chair to her visitor.

"Do I understand," she asked slowly, following his rapid eye about the room, "that you intend to write an article about my grandfather?"

"That's what I'm here for," Mr. Corby genially responded; "that is, if you're willing to help me; for I can't get on without your help," he added with a confident smile.

There was another pause, during which Miss Anson noticed a fleck of dust on the faded leather of the writing-table and a fresh spot of discoloration in the right-hand upper corner of Raphael Morghen's "Parnassus."

"Then you believe in him?" she said, looking up. She could not tell what had prompted her; the words rushed out irresistibly.

"Believe in him?" Corby cried, springing to his feet. "Believe in Orestes Anson? Why, I believe he's simply the greatest—the most stupendous—the most phenomenal figure we've got!"

The color rose to Miss Anson's brow. Her heart was beating passionately. She kept her eyes fixed on the young man's face, as though it might vanish if she looked away.

"You—you mean to say this in your article?" she asked.

“Say it? Why, the facts will say it,” he exulted. “The baldest kind of a statement would make it clear. When a man is as big as that he doesn’t need a pedestal!”

Miss Anson sighed. “People used to say that when I was young,” she murmured. “But now—”

Her visitor stared. “When you were young? But how did they know—when the thing hung fire as it did? When the whole edition was thrown back on his hands?”

“The whole edition—what edition?” It was Miss Anson’s turn to stare.

“Why, of his pamphlet—the pamphlet—the one thing that counts, that survives, that makes him what he is! For heaven’s sake,” he tragically adjured her, “don’t tell me there isn’t a copy of it left!”

Miss Anson was trembling slightly. “I don’t think I understand what you mean,” she faltered, less bewildered by his vehemence than by the strange sense of coming on an unexplored region in the very heart of her dominion.

“Why, his account of the *amphioxus*, of course! You can’t mean that his family didn’t know about it—that *you* don’t know about it? I came across it by the merest accident myself, in a letter of vindication that he wrote in 1830 to an old scientific paper; but I understood there were journals—early journals; there must be references to it somewhere in the ’twenties. He must have been at least ten or twelve years ahead of Yarrell; and he saw the whole significance of it, too—he saw where it led to. As I understand it, he actually anticipated in his pamphlet Saint Hilaire’s theory of the universal type, and supported the hypothesis by describing the notochord of the *amphioxus* as a cartilaginous vertebral column. The specialists of the day jeered at him, of course, as the specialists in Goethe’s time jeered at the plant-metamorphosis. As far as I can make out, the anatomists and zoologists were down on Dr. Anson to a man; that was why his cowardly publishers went back on their bargain. But the pamphlet must be here somewhere—he writes as

though, in his first disappointment, he had destroyed the whole edition; but surely there must be at least one copy left?"

His scientific jargon was as bewildering as his slang; and there were even moments in his discourse when Miss Anson ceased to distinguish between them; but the suspense with which he continued to gaze on her acted as a challenge to her scattered thoughts.

"The *amphioxus*," she murmured, half-rising. "It's an animal, isn't it—a fish? Yes, I think I remember." She sank back with the inward look of one who retraces some lost line of association.

Gradually the distance cleared, the details started into life. In her researches for the biography she had patiently followed every ramification of her subject, and one of these overgrown paths now led her back to the episode in question. The great Orestes's title of "Doctor" had in fact not been merely the spontaneous tribute of a national admiration; he had actually studied medicine in his youth, and his diaries, as his granddaughter now recalled, showed that he had passed through a brief phase of anatomical ardor before his attention was diverted to super-sensual problems. It had indeed seemed to Paulina, as she scanned those early pages, that they revealed a spontaneity, a freshness of feeling somehow absent from his later lucubrations—as though this one emotion had reached him directly, the others through some intervening medium. In the excess of her commemorative zeal she had even struggled through the unintelligible pamphlet to which a few lines in the journal had bitterly directed her. But the subject and the phraseology were alien to her and unconnected with her conception of the great man's genius; and after a hurried perusal she had averted her thoughts from the episode as from a revelation of failure. At length she rose a little unsteadily, supporting herself against the writing-table. She looked hesitatingly about the room; then she drew a key from her old-fashioned reticule and unlocked a drawer beneath one of the book-cases. Young Corby watched her breathlessly. With a tremulous hand she turned over the dusty documents that seemed to fill the drawer.

"Is this it?" she said, holding out a thin discolored volume.

He seized it with a gasp. "Oh, by George," he said, dropping into the nearest chair.

She stood observing him strangely as his eye devoured the mouldy pages.

"Is this the only copy left?" he asked at length, looking up for a moment as a thirsty man lifts his head from his glass.

"I think it must be. I found it long ago, among some old papers that my aunts were burning up after my grandmother's death. They said it was of no use—that he'd always meant to destroy the whole edition and that I ought to respect his wishes. But it was something *he* had written; to burn it was like shutting the door against his voice—against something he had once wished to say, and that nobody had listened to. I wanted him to feel that I was always here, ready to listen, even when others hadn't thought it worth while; and so I kept the pamphlet, meaning to carry out his wish and destroy it before my death."

Her visitor gave a groan of retrospective anguish. "And but for me—but for to-day—you would have?"

"I should have thought it my duty."

"Oh, by George—by George," he repeated, subdued afresh by the inadequacy of speech.

She continued to watch him in silence. At length he jumped up and impulsively caught her by both hands.

"He's bigger and bigger!" he almost shouted. "He simply leads the field! You'll help me go to the bottom of this, won't you? We must turn out all the papers—letters, journals, memoranda. He must have made notes. He must have left some record of what led up to this. We must leave nothing unexplored. By Jove," he cried, looking up at her with his bright convincing smile, "do you know you're the granddaughter of a Great Man?"

Her color flickered like a girl's. "Are you—sure of him?" she whispered, as though putting him on his guard against a possible

betrayal of trust.

“Sure! Sure! My dear lady—” he measured her again with his quick confident glance. “Don’t *you* believe in him?”

She drew back with a confused murmur. “I—used to.” She had left her hands in his: their pressure seemed to send a warm current to her heart. “It ruined my life!” she cried with sudden passion. He looked at her perplexedly.

“I gave up everything,” she went on wildly, “to keep *him* alive. I sacrificed myself—others—I nursed his glory in my bosom and it died—and left me—left me here alone.” She paused and gathered her courage with a gasp. “Don’t make the same mistake!” she warned him.

He shook his head, still smiling. “No danger of that! You’re not alone, my dear lady. He’s here with you—he’s come back to you to-day. Don’t you see what’s happened? Don’t you see that it’s your love that has kept him alive? If you’d abandoned your post for an instant—let things pass into other hands—if your wonderful tenderness hadn’t perpetually kept guard—this might have been—must have been—irretrievably lost.” He laid his hand on the pamphlet. “And then—then he *would* have been dead!”

“Oh,” she said, “don’t tell me too suddenly!” And she turned away and sank into a chair.

The young man stood watching her in an awed silence. For a long time she sat motionless, with her face hidden, and he thought she must be weeping.

At length he said, almost shyly: “You’ll let me come back, then? You’ll help me work this thing out?”

She rose calmly and held out her hand. “I’ll help you,” she declared.

“I’ll come to-morrow, then. Can we get to work early?”

“As early as you please.”

“At eight o’clock, then,” he said briskly. “You’ll have the papers ready?”

“I’ll have everything ready.” She added with a half-playful hesitancy: “And the fire shall be lit for you.”

He went out with his bright nod. She walked to the window and watched his buoyant figure hastening down the elm-shaded street. When she turned back into the empty room she looked as though youth had touched her on the lips.

The Recovery

TO the visiting stranger Hillbridge's first question was, "Have you seen Keniston's things?"

Keniston took precedence of the colonial State House, the Gilbert Stuart Washington and the Ethnological Museum; nay, he ran neck and neck with the President of the University, a prehistoric relic who had known Emerson, and who was still sent about the country in cotton-wool to open educational institutions with a toothless oration on Brook Farm.

Keniston was sent about the country too: he opened art exhibitions, laid the foundation of academies, and acted in a general sense as the spokesman and apologist of art. Hillbridge was proud of him in his peripatetic character, but his fellow-townsmen let it be understood that to "know" Keniston one must come to Hillbridge. Never was work more dependent for its effect on "atmosphere," on *milieu*. Hillbridge was Keniston's *milieu*, and there was one lady, a devotee of his art, who went so far as to assert that once, at an exhibition in New York, she had passed a Keniston without recognizing it. "It simply didn't want to be seen in such surroundings; it was hiding itself under an incognito," she declared.

It was a source of special pride to Hillbridge that it contained all the artist's best works. Strangers were told that Hillbridge had discovered him. The discovery had come about in the simplest manner. Professor Driffert, who had a reputation for "collecting," had one day hung a sketch on his drawing-room wall, and thereafter Mrs. Driffert's visitors (always a little flurried by the sense that it was

the kind of house in which one might be suddenly called upon to distinguish between a dry-point and an etching, or between Raphael Mengs and Raphael Sanzio) were not infrequently subjected to the Professor's off-hand inquiry, "By-the-way, have you seen my Keniston?" The visitors, perceptibly awed, would retreat to a critical distance and murmur the usual guarded generalities, while they tried to keep the name in mind long enough to look it up in the Encyclopædia. The name was not in the Encyclopædia; but, as a compensating fact, it became known that the man himself was in Hillbridge. Hillbridge, then, owned an artist whose celebrity it was the proper thing to take for granted! Some one else, emboldened by the thought, bought a Keniston; and the next year, on the occasion of the President's golden jubilee, the Faculty, by unanimous consent, presented him with a Keniston. Two years later there was a Keniston exhibition, to which the art-critics came from New York and Boston; and not long afterward a well-known Chicago collector vainly attempted to buy Professor Driffert's sketch, which the art journals cited as a rare example of the painter's first or silvery manner. Thus there gradually grew up a small circle of connoisseurs known in artistic circles as men who collected Kenistons.

Professor Wildmarsh, of the chair of Fine Arts and Archæology, was the first critic to publish a detailed analysis of the master's methods and purpose. The article was illustrated by engravings which (though they had cost the magazine a fortune) were declared by Professor Wildmarsh to give but an imperfect suggestion of the esoteric significance of the originals. The Professor, with a tact that contrived to make each reader feel himself included among the exceptions, went on to say that Keniston's work would never appeal to any but exceptional natures; and he closed with the usual assertion that to apprehend the full meaning of the master's "message" it was necessary to see him in the surroundings of his own home at Hillbridge.

Professor Wildmarsh's article was read one spring afternoon by a

young lady just speeding eastward on her first visit to Hillbridge, and already flushed with anticipation of the intellectual opportunities awaiting her. In East Onondauga, where she lived, Hillbridge was looked on as an Oxford. Magazine writers, with the easy American use of the superlative, designated it as “the venerable Alma Mater,” the “antique seat of learning,” and Claudia Day had been brought up to regard it as the fountain-head of knowledge, and of that mental distinction which is so much rarer than knowledge. An innate passion for all that was thus distinguished and exceptional made her revere Hillbridge as the native soil of those intellectual amenities that were of such difficult growth in the thin air of East Onondauga. At the first suggestion of a visit to Hillbridge—whither she went at the invitation of a girl friend who (incredible apotheosis!) had married one of the University professors—Claudia’s spirit dilated with the sense of new possibilities. The vision of herself walking under the “historic elms” toward the Memorial Library, standing rapt before the Stuart Washington, or drinking in, from some obscure corner of an academic drawing-room, the President’s reminiscences of the Concord group—this vividness of self-projection into the emotions awaiting her made her glad of any delay that prolonged so exquisite a moment.

It was in this mood that she opened the article on Keniston. She knew about him, of course; she was wonderfully “well up,” even for East Onondauga. She had read of him in the magazines; she had met, on a visit to New York, a man who collected Kenistons, and a photogravure of a Keniston in an “artistic” frame hung above her writing-table at home. But Professor Wildmarsh’s article made her feel how little she really knew of the master; and she trembled to think of the state of relative ignorance in which, but for the timely purchase of the magazine, she might have entered Hillbridge. She had, for instance, been densely unaware that Keniston had already had three “manners,” and was showing symptoms of a fourth. She was equally ignorant of the fact that he had founded a school and

“created a formula”; and she learned with a thrill that no one could hope to understand him who had not seen him in his studio at Hillbridge, surrounded by his own works. “The man and the art interpret each other,” their exponent declared; and Claudia Day, bending a brilliant eye on the future, wondered if she were ever to be admitted to the privilege of that double initiation.

Keniston, to his other claims to distinction, added that of being hard to know. His friends always hastened to announce the fact to strangers—adding after a pause of suspense that they “would see what they could do.” Visitors in whose favor he was induced to make an exception were further warned that he never spoke unless he was interested—so that they mustn’t mind if he remained silent. It was under these reassuring conditions that, some ten days after her arrival at Hillbridge, Miss Day was introduced to the master’s studio. She found him a tall listless-looking man, who appeared middle-aged to her youth, and who stood before his own pictures with a vaguely interrogative gaze, leaving the task of their interpretation to the lady who had courageously contrived the visit. The studio, to Claudia’s surprise, was bare and shabby. It formed a rambling addition to the small cheerless house in which the artist lived with his mother and a widowed sister. For Claudia it added the last touch to his distinction to learn that he was poor, and that what he earned was devoted to the maintenance of the two limp women who formed a neutral-tinted background to his impressive outline. His pictures of course fetched high prices; but he worked slowly—“painfully,” as his devotees preferred to phrase it—with frequent intervals of ill health and inactivity, and the circle of Keniston connoisseurs was still as small as it was distinguished. The girl’s fancy instantly hailed in him that favorite figure of imaginative youth, the artist who would rather starve than paint a pot-boiler. It is known to comparatively few that the production of successful pot-boilers is an art in itself, and that such heroic abstentions as Keniston’s are not always purely voluntary.

On the occasion of her first visit the artist said so little that Claudia was able to indulge to the full the harrowing sense of her inadequacy. No wonder she had not been one of the few that he cared to talk to; every word she uttered must so obviously have diminished the inducement! She had been cheap, trivial, conventional; at once gushing and inexpressive, eager and constrained. She could feel him counting the minutes till the visit was over, and as the door finally closed on the scene of her discomfiture she almost shared the hope with which she confidently credited him—that they might never meet again.

II

Mrs. Davant glanced reverentially about the studio. "I have always said," she murmured, "that they ought to be seen in Europe."

Mrs. Davant was young, credulous and emotionally extravagant: she reminded Claudia of her earlier self—the self that, ten years before, had first set an awe-struck foot on that very threshold.

"Not for *his* sake," Mrs. Davant continued, "but for Europe's."

Claudia smiled. She was glad that her husband's pictures were to be exhibited in Paris. She concurred in Mrs. Davant's view of the importance of the event; but she thought her visitor's way of putting the case a little overcharged. Ten years spent in an atmosphere of Keniston-worship had insensibly developed in Claudia a preference for moderation of speech. She believed in her husband, of course; to believe in him, with an increasing abandonment and tenacity, had become one of the necessary laws of being; but she did not believe in his admirers. Their faith in him was perhaps as genuine as her own; but it seemed to her less able to give an account of itself. Some few of his appreciators doubtless measured him by their own standards; but it was difficult not to feel that in the Hillbridge circle, where rapture ran the highest, he was accepted on what was at best but an indirect valuation; and now and then she had a frightened doubt as to the independence of her own convictions. That innate sense of

relativity which even East Onondagua had not been able to check in Claudia Day had been fostered in Mrs. Keniston by the artistic absolutism of Hillbridge, and she often wondered that her husband remained so uncritical of the quality of admiration accorded him. Her husband's uncritical attitude toward himself and his admirers had in fact been one of the surprises of her marriage. That an artist should believe in his potential powers seemed to her at once the incentive and the pledge of excellence: she knew there was no future for a hesitating talent. What perplexed her was Keniston's satisfaction in his achievement. She had always imagined that the true artist must regard himself as the imperfect vehicle of the cosmic emotion—that beneath every difficulty overcome a new one lurked, the vision widening as the scope enlarged. To be initiated into these creative struggles, to shed on the toiler's path the consolatory ray of faith and encouragement, had seemed the chief privilege of her marriage. But there is something supererogatory in believing in a man obviously disposed to perform that service for himself; and Claudia's ardor gradually spent itself against the dense surface of her husband's complacency. She could smile now at her vision of an intellectual communion which should admit her to the inmost precincts of his inspiration. She had learned that the creative processes are seldom self-explanatory, and Keniston's inarticulateness no longer discouraged her; but she could not reconcile her sense of the continuity of all high effort to his unperturbed air of finishing each picture as though he had despatched a masterpiece to posterity. In the first recoil from her disillusionment she even allowed herself to perceive that, if he worked slowly, it was not because he mistrusted his powers of expression, but because he had really so little to express.

"It's for Europe," Mrs. Davant vaguely repeated; and Claudia noticed that she was blushing intent on tracing with the tip of her elaborate sunshade the pattern of the shabby carpet.

"It will be a revelation to them," she went on provisionally, as

though Claudia had missed her cue and left an awkward interval to fill.

Claudia had in fact a sudden sense of deficient intuition. She felt that her visitor had something to communicate which required, on her own part, an intelligent co-operation; but what it was her insight failed to suggest. She was, in truth, a little tired of Mrs. Davant, who was Keniston's latest worshipper, who ordered pictures recklessly, who paid for them regally in advance, and whose gallery was, figuratively speaking, crowded with the artist's unpainted masterpieces. Claudia's impatience was perhaps complicated by the uneasy sense that Mrs. Davant was too young, too rich, too inexperienced; that somehow she ought to be warned.—Warned of what? That some of the pictures might never be painted? Scarcely that, since Keniston, who was scrupulous in business transactions, might be trusted not to take any material advantage of such evidence of faith. Claudia's impulse remained undefined. She merely felt that she would have liked to help Mrs. Davant, and that she did not know how.

"You'll be there to see them?" she asked, as her visitor lingered.

"In Paris?" Mrs. Davant's blush deepened. "We must all be there together."

Claudia smiled. "My husband and I mean to go abroad some day—but I don't see any chance of it at present."

"But he *ought* to go—you ought both to go this summer!" Mrs. Davant persisted. "I know Professor Wildmarsh and Professor Driffert and all the other critics think that Mr. Keniston's never having been to Europe has given his work much of its wonderful individuality, its peculiar flavor and meaning—but now that his talent is formed, that he has full command of his means of expression," (Claudia recognized one of Professor Driffert's favorite formulas) "they all think he ought to see the work of the *other* great masters—that he ought to visit the home of his ancestors, as Professor Wildmarsh says!" She stretched an impulsive hand to Claudia. "You ought to let

him go, Mrs. Keniston!"

Claudia accepted the admonition with the philosophy of the wife who is used to being advised on the management of her husband. "I sha'n't interfere with him," she declared; and Mrs. Davant instantly caught her up with a cry of, "Oh, it's too lovely of you to say that!" With this exclamation she left Claudia to a silent renewal of wonder.

A moment later Keniston entered: to a mind curious in combinations it might have occurred that he had met Mrs. Davant on the door-step. In one sense he might, for all his wife cared, have met fifty Mrs. Davants on the door-step: it was long since Claudia had enjoyed the solace of resenting such coincidences. Her only thought now was that her husband's first words might not improbably explain Mrs. Davant's last; and she waited for him to speak.

He paused with his hands in his pockets before an unfinished picture on the easel; then, as his habit was, he began to stroll touristlike from canvas to canvas, standing before each in a musing ecstasy of contemplation that no readjustment of view ever seemed to disturb. Her eye instinctively joined his in its inspection; it was the one point where their natures merged. Thank God, there was no doubt about the pictures! She was what she had always dreamed of being—the wife of a great artist. Keniston dropped into an armchair and filled his pipe. "How should you like to go to Europe?" he asked.

His wife looked up quickly. "When?"

"Now—this spring, I mean." He paused to light the pipe. "I should like to be over there while these things are being exhibited."

Claudia was silent.

"Well?" he repeated after a moment.

"How can we afford it?" she asked.

Keniston had always scrupulously fulfilled his duty to the mother and sister whom his marriage had dislodged; and Claudia, who had the atoning temperament which seeks to pay for every happiness by making it a source of fresh obligations, had from the outset accepted his ties with an exaggerated devotion. Any disregard of such a claim

would have vulgarized her most delicate pleasures; and her husband's sensitiveness to it in great measure extenuated the artistic obtuseness that often seemed to her like a failure of the moral sense. His loyalty to the dull women who depended on him was, after all, compounded of finer tissues than any mere sensibility to ideal demands.

"Oh, I don't see why we shouldn't," he rejoined. "I think we might manage it."

"At Mrs. Davant's expense?" leaped from Claudia. She could not tell why she had said it; some inner barrier seemed to have given way under a confused pressure of emotions.

He looked up at her with frank surprise. "Well, she *has* been very jolly about it—why not? She has a tremendous feeling for art—the keenest I ever knew in a woman." Claudia imperceptibly smiled. "She wants me to let her pay in advance for the four panels she has ordered for the Memorial Library. That would give us plenty of money for the trip, and my having the panels to do is another reason for my wanting to go abroad just now."

"Another reason?"

"Yes; I've never worked on such a big scale. I want to see how those old chaps did the trick; I want to measure myself with the big fellows over there. An artist ought to, once in his life."

She gave him a wondering look. For the first time his words implied a sense of possible limitation; but his easy tone seemed to retract what they conceded. What he really wanted was fresh food for his self-satisfaction: he was like an army that moves on after exhausting the resources of the country.

Womanlike, she abandoned the general survey of the case for the consideration of a minor point.

"Are you sure you can do that kind of thing?" she asked.

"What kind of thing?"

"The panels."

He glanced at her indulgently: his self-confidence was too

impenetrable to feel the pin-prick of such a doubt.

"Immensely sure," he said with a smile.

"And you don't mind taking so much money from her in advance?"

He stared. "Why should I? She'll get it back—with interest!" He laughed and drew at his pipe. "It will be an uncommonly interesting experience. I shouldn't wonder if it freshened me up a bit."

She looked at him again. This second hint of self-distrust struck her as the sign of a quickened sensibility. What if, after all, he was beginning to be dissatisfied with his work? The thought filled her with a renovating sense of his sufficiency.

III

They stopped in London to see the National Gallery.

It was thus that, in their inexperience, they had narrowly put it; but in reality every stone of the streets, every trick of the atmosphere, had its message of surprise for their virgin sensibilities. The pictures were simply the summing up, the final interpretation, of the cumulative pressure of an unimagined world; and it seemed to Claudia that long before they reached the doors of the gallery she had some intuitive revelation of what awaited them within.

They moved about from room to room without exchanging a word. The vast noiseless spaces seemed full of sound, like the roar of a distant multitude heard only by the inner ear. Had their speech been articulate their language would have been incomprehensible; and even that far-off murmur of meaning pressed intolerably on Claudia's nerves. Keniston took the onset without outward sign of disturbance. Now and then he paused before a canvas, or prolonged from one of the benches his silent communion with some miracle of line or color; but he neither looked at his wife nor spoke to her. He seemed to have forgotten her presence.

Claudia was conscious of keeping a furtive watch on him; but the sum total of her impressions was negative. She remembered thinking when she first met him that his face was rather expressionless; and

he had the habit of self-engrossed silences.

All that evening, at the hotel, they talked about London, and he surprised her by an acuteness of observation that she had sometimes inwardly accused him of lacking. He seemed to have seen everything, to have examined, felt, compared, with nerves as finely adjusted as her own; but he said nothing of the pictures. The next day they returned to the National Gallery, and he began to study the paintings in detail, pointing out differences of technique, analyzing and criticising, but still without summing up his conclusions. He seemed to have a sort of provincial dread of showing himself too much impressed. Claudia's own sensations were too complex, too overwhelming, to be readily classified. Lacking the craftsman's instinct to steady her, she felt herself carried off her feet by the rush of incoherent impressions. One point she consciously avoided, and that was the comparison of her husband's work with what they were daily seeing. Art, she inwardly argued, was too various, too complex, dependent on too many inter-relations of feeling and environment, to allow of its being judged by any provisional standard. Even the subtleties of technique must be modified by the artist's changing purpose, as this in turn is acted on by influences of which he is himself unconscious. How, then, was an unprepared imagination to distinguish between such varied reflections of the elusive vision? She took refuge in a passionate exaggeration of her own ignorance and insufficiency.

After a week in London they went to Paris. The exhibition of Keniston's pictures had been opened a few days earlier; and as they drove through the streets on the way to the station an "impressionist" poster here and there invited them to the display of the American artist's work. Mrs. Davant, who had been in Paris for the opening, had already written rapturously of the impression produced, enclosing commendatory notices from one or two papers. She reported that there had been a great crowd on the first day, and

that the critics had been "immensely struck."

The Kenistons arrived in the evening, and the next morning Claudia, as a matter of course, asked her husband at what time he meant to go and see the pictures.

He looked up absently from his guide-book.

"What pictures?"

"Why—yours," she said, surprised.

"Oh, they'll keep," he answered; adding with a slightly embarrassed laugh, "We'll give the other chaps a show first." Presently he laid down his book and proposed that they should go to the Louvre.

They spent the morning there, lunched at a restaurant near by, and returned to the gallery in the afternoon. Keniston had passed from inarticulateness to an eager volubility. It was clear that he was beginning to co-ordinate his impressions, to find his way about in a corner of the great imaginative universe. He seemed extraordinarily ready to impart his discoveries; and Claudia felt that her ignorance served him as a convenient buffer against the terrific impact of new sensations.

On the way home she asked when he meant to see Mrs. Davant.

His answer surprised her. "Does she know we're here?"

"Not unless you've sent her word," said Claudia, with a touch of harmless irony.

"That's all right, then," he returned simply. "I want to wait and look about a day or two longer. She'd want us to go sight-seeing with her; and I'd rather get my impressions alone."

The next two days were hampered by the necessity of eluding Mrs. Davant. Claudia, under different circumstances, would have scrupled to share in this somewhat shabby conspiracy; but she found herself in a state of suspended judgment, wherein her husband's treatment of Mrs. Davant became for the moment merely a clue to larger meanings.

They had been four days in Paris when Claudia, returning one

afternoon from a parenthetical excursion to the Rue de la Paix, was confronted on her threshold by the reproachful figure of their benefactress. It was not to her, however, that Mrs. Davant's reproaches were addressed. Keniston, it appeared, had borne the brunt of them; for he stood leaning against the mantelpiece of their modest *salon* in that attitude of convicted negligence when, if ever, a man is glad to take refuge behind his wife.

Claudia had however no immediate intention of affording him such shelter. She wanted to observe and wait.

"He's too impossible!" cried Mrs. Davant, sweeping her at once into the central current of her grievance.

Claudia looked from one to the other.

"For not going to see you?"

"For not going to see his pictures!" cried the other nobly.

Claudia colored and Keniston shifted his position uneasily.

"I can't make her understand," he said, turning to his wife.

"I don't care about myself!" Mrs. Davant interjected.

"I do, then; it's the only thing I do care about," he hurriedly protested. "I meant to go at once—to write—Claudia wanted to go, but I wouldn't let her." He looked helplessly about the pleasant red-curtained room, which was rapidly burning itself into Claudia's consciousness as a visible extension of Mrs. Davant's claims.

"I can't explain," he broke off.

Mrs. Davant in turn addressed herself to Claudia.

"People think it's so odd," she complained. "So many of the artists here are anxious to meet him; they've all been so charming about the pictures; and several of our American friends have come over from London expressly for the exhibition. I told every one that he would be here for the opening—there was a private view, you know—and they were so disappointed—they wanted to give him an ovation; and I didn't know what to say. What *am* I to say?" she abruptly ended.

"There's nothing to say," said Keniston slowly.

"But the exhibition closes the day after to-morrow."

"Well, *I* sha'n't close—I shall be here," he declared with an effort at playfulness. "If they want to see me—all these people you're kind enough to mention—won't there be other chances?"

"But I wanted them to see you *among* your pictures—to hear you talk about them, explain them in that wonderful way. I wanted you to interpret each other, as Professor Wildmarsh says!"

"Oh, hang Professor Wildmarsh!" said Keniston, softening the commination with a smile. "If my pictures are good for anything they oughtn't to need explaining."

Mrs. Davant stared. "But I thought that was what made them so interesting!" she exclaimed.

Keniston looked down. "Perhaps it was," he murmured.

There was an awkward silence, which Claudia broke by saying, with a glance at her husband: "But if the exhibition is to remain open to-morrow, could we not meet you there? And perhaps you could send word to some of our friends."

Mrs. Davant brightened like a child whose broken toy is glued together. "Oh, *do* make him!" she implored. "I'll ask them to come in the afternoon—we'll make it into a little tea—a *five o'clock*. I'll send word at once to everybody!" She gathered up her beruffled boa and sunshade, settling her plumage like a reassured bird. "It will be too lovely!" she ended in a self-consoling murmur.

But in the doorway a new doubt assailed her. "You won't fail me?" she said, turning plaintively to Keniston. "You'll make him come, Mrs. Keniston?"

"I'll bring him!" Claudia promised.

IV

When, the next morning, she appeared equipped for their customary ramble, her husband surprised her by announcing that he meant to stay at home.

"The fact is I'm rather surfeited," he said, smiling. "I suppose my appetite isn't equal to such a plethora. I think I'll write some letters

and join you somewhere later.”

She detected the wish to be alone and responded to it with her usual readiness.

“I shall sink to my proper level and buy a bonnet, then,” she said. “I haven’t had time to take the edge off that appetite.”

They agreed to meet at the Hôtel Cluny at mid-day, and she set out alone with a vague sense of relief. Neither she nor Keniston had made any direct reference to Mrs. Davant’s visit; but its effect was implicit in their eagerness to avoid each other.

Claudia accomplished some shopping in the spirit of perfunctoriness that robs even new bonnets of their bloom; and this business despatched, she turned aimlessly into the wide inviting brightness of the streets. Never had she felt more isolated amid that ordered beauty which gives a social quality to the very stones and mortar of Paris. All about her were evidences of an artistic sensibility pervading every form of life like the nervous structure of the huge frame—a sensibility so delicate, alert and universal that it seemed to leave no room for obtuseness or error. In such a medium the faculty of plastic expression must develop as unconsciously as any organ in its normal surroundings; to be “artistic” must cease to be an attitude and become a natural function. To Claudia the significance of the whole vast revelation was centred in the light it shed on one tiny spot of consciousness—the value of her husband’s work. There are moments when to the groping soul the world’s accumulated experiences are but steppingstones across a private difficulty.

She stood hesitating on a street corner. It was barely eleven, and she had an hour to spare before going to the Hôtel Cluny. She seemed to be letting her inclination float as it would on the cross-currents of suggestion emanating from the brilliant complex scene before her; but suddenly, in obedience to an impulse that she became aware of only in acting on it, she called a cab and drove to the gallery where her husband’s pictures were exhibited.

A magnificent official in gold braid sold her a ticket and pointed

the way up the empty crimson-carpeted stairs. His duplicate, on the upper landing, held out a catalogue with an air of recognizing the futility of the offer; and a moment later she found herself in the long noiseless impressive room full of velvet-covered ottomans and exotic plants. It was clear that the public ardor on which Mrs. Davant had expatiated had spent itself earlier in the week; for Claudia had this luxurious apartment to herself. Something about its air of rich privacy, its diffusion of that sympathetic quality in other countries so conspicuously absent from the public show-room, seemed to emphasize its present emptiness. It was as though the flowers, the carpet, the lounges, surrounded their visitor's solitary advance with the mute assurance that they had done all they could toward making the thing "go off," and that if they had failed it was simply for lack of co-operation. She stood still and looked about her. The pictures struck her instantly as odd gaps in the general harmony; it was self-evident that they had not co-operated. They had not been pushing, aggressive, discordant: they had merely effaced themselves. She swept a startled eye from one familiar painting to another. The canvases were all there—and the frames—but the miracle, the mirage of life and meaning, had vanished like some atmospheric illusion. What was it that had happened? And had it happened to *her* or to the pictures? She tried to rally her frightened thoughts; to push or coax them into a semblance of resistance; but argument was swept off its feet by the huge rush of a single conviction—the conviction that the pictures were bad. There was no standing up against that: she felt herself submerged.

The stealthy fear that had been following her all these days had her by the throat now. The great vision of beauty through which she had been moving as one enchanted was turned to a phantasmagoria of evil mocking shapes. She hated the past; she hated its splendor, its power, its wicked magical vitality. . . She dropped into a seat and continued to stare at the wall before her. Gradually, as she stared, there stole out to her from the dimmed humbled canvases a reminder

of what she had once seen in them, a spectral appeal to her faith to call them back to life. What proof had she that her present estimate of them was less subjective than the other? The confused impressions of the last few days were hardly to be pleaded as a valid theory of art. How, after all, did she know that the pictures were bad? On what suddenly acquired technical standard had she thus decided the case against them? It seemed as though it were a standard outside of herself, as though some unheeded inner sense were gradually making her aware of the presence, in that empty room, of a critical intelligence that was giving out a subtle effluence of disapproval. The fancy was so vivid that, to shake it off, she rose and began to move about again. In the middle of the room stood a monumental divan surmounted by a *massif* of palms and azaleas. As Claudia's muffled wanderings carried her around the angle of this seat, she saw that its farther side was occupied by the figure of a man, who sat with his hands resting on his stick and his head bowed upon them. She gave a little cry and her husband rose and faced her.

Instantly the live point of consciousness was shifted, and she became aware that the quality of the pictures no longer mattered. It was what *he* thought of them that counted: her life hung on that.

They looked at each other a moment in silence; such concussions are not apt to flash into immediate speech. At length he said simply, "I didn't know you were coming here."

She colored as though he had charged her with something underhand.

"I didn't mean to," she stammered; "but I was too early for our appointment—"

Her words cast a revealing glare on the situation. Neither of them looked at the pictures; but to Claudia those unobtruding presences seemed suddenly to press upon them and force them apart.

Keniston glanced at his watch. "It's twelve o'clock," he said. "Shall we go on?"

At the door he called a cab and put her in it; then, drawing out his watch again, he said abruptly: "I believe I'll let you go alone. I'll join you at the hotel in time for luncheon." She wondered for a moment if he meant to return to the gallery; but, looking back as she drove off, she saw him walk rapidly away in the opposite direction.

The cabman had carried her half-way to the Hôtel Cluny before she realized where she was going, and cried out to him to turn home. There was an acute irony in this mechanical prolongation of the quest of beauty. She had had enough of it, too much of it; her one longing was to escape, to hide herself away from its all-suffusing implacable light.

At the hotel, alone in her room, a few tears came to soften her seared vision; but her mood was too tense to be eased by weeping. Her whole being was centred in the longing to know what her husband thought. Their short exchange of words had, after all, told her nothing. She had guessed a faint resentment at her unexpected appearance; but that might merely imply a dawning sense, on his part, of being furtively watched and criticised. She had sometimes wondered if he was never conscious of her observation; there were moments when it seemed to radiate from her in visible waves. Perhaps, after all, he was aware of it, on his guard against it, as a lurking knife behind the thick curtain of his complacency; and today he must have caught the gleam of the blade.

Claudia had not reached the age when pity is the first chord to vibrate in contact with any revelation of failure. Her one hope had been that Keniston should be clear-eyed enough to face the truth. Whatever it turned out to be, she wanted him to measure himself with it. But as his image rose before her she felt a sudden half-maternal longing to thrust herself between him and disaster. Her eagerness to see him tested by circumstances seemed now like a cruel scientific curiosity. She saw in a flash of sympathy that he would need her most if he fell beneath his fate.

He did not, after all, return for luncheon; and when she came upstairs from her solitary meal their *salon* was still untenanted. She permitted herself no sensational fears; for she could not, at the height of apprehension, figure Keniston as yielding to any tragic impulse; but the lengthening hours brought an uneasiness that was fuel to her pity. Suddenly she heard the clock strike five. It was the hour at which they had promised to meet Mrs. Davant at the gallery—the hour of the “ovation.” Claudia rose and went to the window, straining for a glimpse of her husband in the crowded street. Could it be that he had forgotten her, had gone to the gallery without her? Or had something happened—that veiled “something” which, for the last hour, had grimly hovered on the outskirts of her mind?

She heard a hand on the door and Keniston entered. As she turned to meet him her whole being was swept forward on a great wave of pity: she was so sure, now, that he must know.

But he confronted her with a glance of preoccupied brightness; her first impression was that she had never seen him so vividly, so expressively pleased. If he needed her, it was not to bind up his wounds.

He gave her a smile which was clearly the lingering reflection of some inner light. “I didn’t mean to be so late,” he said, tossing aside his hat and the little red volume that served as a clue to his explorations. “I turned in to the Louvre for a minute after I left you this morning, and the place fairly swallowed me up—I couldn’t get away from it. I’ve been there ever since.” He threw himself into a chair and glanced about for his pipe.

“It takes time,” he continued musingly, “to get at them, to make out what they’re saying—the big fellows, I mean. They’re not a communicative lot. At first I couldn’t make much out of their lingo—it was too different from mine! But gradually, by picking up a hint here and there, and piecing them together, I’ve begun to understand; and to-day, by Jove, I got one or two of the old chaps by the throat and fairly turned them inside out—made them deliver up their last

drop." He lifted a brilliant eye to her. "Lord, it was tremendous!" he declared.

He had found his pipe and was musingly filling it. Claudia waited in silence.

"At first," he began again, "I was afraid their language was too hard for me—that I should never quite know what they were driving at; they seemed to cold-shoulder me, to be bent on shutting me out. But I was bound I wouldn't be beaten, and now, to-day"—he paused a moment to strike a match—"when I went to look at those things of mine it all came over me in a flash. By Jove! It was as if I'd made them all into a big bonfire to light me on my road!"

His wife was trembling with a kind of sacred terror. She had been afraid to pray for light for him, and here he was joyfully casting his whole past upon the pyre!

"Is there nothing left?" she faltered.

"Nothing left? There's everything!" he exulted. "Why, here I am, not much over forty, and I've found out already—already!" He stood up and began to move excitedly about the room. "My God! Suppose I'd never known! Suppose I'd gone on painting things like that forever! Why, I feel like those chaps at revivalist meetings when they get up and say they're saved! Won't somebody please start a hymn?"

Claudia, with a tremulous joy, was letting herself go on the strong current of his emotion; but it had not yet carried her beyond her depth, and suddenly she felt hard ground underfoot.

"Mrs. Davant—" she exclaimed.

He stared, as though suddenly recalled from a long distance. "Mrs. Davant?"

"We were to have met her—this afternoon—now—"

"At the gallery? Oh, that's all right. I put a stop to that; I went to see her after I left you; I explained it all to her."

"All? "

"I told her I was going to begin all over again."

Claudia's heart gave a forward bound and then sank back

hopelessly.

“But the panels—?”

“That’s all right too. I told her about the panels,” he reassured her.

“You told her—?”

“That I can’t paint them now. She doesn’t understand, of course; but she’s the best little woman and she trusts me.”

She could have wept for joy at his exquisite obtuseness. “But that isn’t all,” she wailed. “It doesn’t matter how much you’ve explained to her. It doesn’t do away with the fact that we’re living on those panels!”

“Living on them?”

“On the money that she paid you to paint them. Isn’t that what brought us here? And—if you mean to do as you say—to begin all over again—how in the world are we ever to pay her back?”

Her husband turned on her an inspired eye. “There’s only one way that I know of,” he imperturbably declared, “and that’s to stay out here till I learn how to paint them.”

The Rembrandt

YOU'RE so artistic," my cousin Eleanor Copt began.

Of all Eleanor's exordiums it is the one I most dread. When she tells me I'm so clever I know this is merely the preamble to inviting me to meet the last literary obscurity of the moment: a trial to be evaded or endured, as circumstances dictate; whereas her calling me artistic fatally connotes the request to visit, in her company, some distressed gentlewoman whose future hangs on my valuation of her old Saxe or of her grandfather's Marc Antonios. Time was when I attempted to resist these compulsions of Eleanor's; but I soon learned that, short of actual flight, there was no refuge from her beneficent despotism. It is not always easy for the curator of a museum to abandon his post on the plea of escaping a pretty cousin's importunities; and Eleanor, aware of my predicament, is none too magnanimous to take advantage of it. Magnanimity is, in fact, not in Eleanor's line. The virtues, she once explained to me, are like bonnets: the very ones that look best on other people may not happen to suit one's own particular style; and she added, with a slight deflection of metaphor, that none of the ready-made virtues ever *had* fitted her: they all pinched somewhere, and she'd given up trying to wear them.

Therefore when she said to me, "You're so artistic," emphasizing the conjunction with a tap of her dripping umbrella (Eleanor is out in all weathers: the elements are as powerless against her as man), I merely stipulated, "It's not old Saxe again?"

She shook her head reassuringly. "A picture—a Rembrandt!"

“Good Lord! Why not a Leonardo?”

“Well”—she smiled—“that, of course, depends on *you*.”

“On me?”

“On your attribution. I dare say Mrs. Fontage would consent to the change—though she’s very conservative.”

A gleam of hope came to me and I pronounced: “One can’t judge of a picture in this weather.”

“Of course not. I’m coming for you to-morrow.”

“I’ve an engagement to-morrow.”

“I’ll come before or after your engagement.”

The afternoon paper lay at my elbow and I contrived a furtive consultation of the weather-report. It said “Rain tomorrow,” and I answered briskly: “All right, then; come at ten”—rapidly calculating that the clouds on which I counted might lift by noon.

My ingenuity failed of its due reward; for the heavens, as if in league with my cousin, emptied themselves before morning, and punctually at ten Eleanor and the sun appeared together in my office.

I hardly listened, as we descended the Museum steps and got into Eleanor’s hansom, to her vivid summing-up of the case. I guessed beforehand that the lady we were about to visit had lapsed by the most distressful degrees from opulence to a “hall-bedroom”; that her grandfather, if he had not been Minister to France, had signed the Declaration of Independence; that the Rembrandt was an heirloom, sole remnant of disbanded treasures; that for years its possessor had been unwilling to part with it, and that even now the question of its disposal must be approached with the most diplomatic obliquity.

Previous experience had taught me that all Eleanor’s “cases” presented a harrowing similarity of detail. No circumstance tending to excite the spectator’s sympathy and involve his action was omitted from the history of her beneficiaries; the lights and shades were indeed so skilfully adjusted that any impartial expression of opinion took on the hue of cruelty. I could have produced closetfuls of “heirlooms” in attestation of this fact; for it is one more mark of

Eleanor's competence that her friends usually pay the interest on her philanthropy. My one hope was that in this case the object, being a picture, might reasonably be rated beyond my means; and as our cab drew up before a blistered brown-stone doorstep I formed the self-defensive resolve to place an extreme valuation on Mrs. Fontage's Rembrandt. It is Eleanor's fault if she is sometimes fought with her own weapons.

The house stood in one of those shabby provisional-looking New York streets that seem resignedly awaiting demolition. It was the kind of house that, in its high days, must have had a bow-window with a bronze in it. The bow-window had been replaced by a plumber's *devanture*, and one might conceive the bronze to have gravitated to the limbo where Mexican onyx tables and bric-à-brac in buffalo-horn await the first signs of our next æsthetic reaction.

Eleanor swept me through a hall that smelled of poverty, up unlit stairs to a bare slit of a room. "And she must leave this in a month!" she whispered across her knock.

I had prepared myself for the limp widow's weed of a woman that one figures in such a setting; and confronted abruptly with Mrs. Fontage's white-haired erectness I had the disconcerting sense that I was somehow in her presence at my own solicitation. I instinctively charged Eleanor with this reversal of the situation; but a moment later I saw it must be ascribed to a something about Mrs. Fontage that precluded the possibility of her asking any one a favor. It was not that she was of forbidding, or even majestic, demeanor; but that one guessed, under her aquiline prettiness, a dignity nervously on guard against the petty betrayal of her surroundings. The room was unconcealably poor: the little faded "relics," the high-stocked ancestral silhouettes, the steel-engravings after Raphael and Correggio, grouped in a vain attempt to hide the most obvious stains on the wall-paper, served only to accentuate the contrast of a past evidently diversified by foreign travel and the enjoyment of the arts. Even Mrs. Fontage's dress had the air of being a last expedient, the

ultimate outcome of a much-taxed ingenuity in darning and turning. One felt that all the poor lady's barriers were falling save that of her impregnable manner.

To this manner I found myself conveying my appreciation of being admitted to a view of the Rembrandt.

Mrs. Fontage's smile took my homage for granted. "It is always," she conceded, "a privilege to be in the presence of the great masters." Her slim wrinkled hand waved me to a dusky canvas near the window.

"It's so interesting, dear Mrs. Fontage," I heard Eleanor exclaiming, "and my cousin will be able to tell you exactly—" Eleanor, in my presence, always admits that she knows nothing about art; but she gives the impression that this is merely because she hasn't had time to look into the matter—and has had me to do it for her.

Mrs. Fontage seated herself without speaking, as though fearful that a breath might disturb my communion with the masterpiece. I felt that she thought Eleanor's reassuring ejaculations ill-timed; and in this I was of one mind with her; for the impossibility of telling her exactly what I thought of her Rembrandt had become clear to me at a glance.

My cousin's vivacities began to languish and the silence seemed to shape itself into a receptacle for my verdict. I stepped back, affecting a more distant scrutiny; and as I did so my eye caught Mrs. Fontage's profile. Her lids trembled slightly. I took refuge in the familiar expedient of asking the history of the picture, and she waved me brightly to a seat.

This was indeed a topic on which she could dilate. The Rembrandt, it appeared, had come into Mr. Fontage's possession many years ago, while the young couple were on their wedding-tour, and under circumstances so romantic that she made no excuse for relating them in all their parenthetic fulness. The picture belonged to an old Belgian Countess of redundant quarterings, whom the extravagances of an ungovernable nephew had compelled to part with her

possessions (in the most private manner) about the time of the Fontages' arrival. By a really remarkable coincidence, it happened that their courier (an exceptionally intelligent and superior man) was an old servant of the Countess's, and had thus been able to put them in the way of securing the Rembrandt under the very nose of an English Duke, whose agent had been sent to Brussels to negotiate for its purchase. Mrs. Fontage could not recall the Duke's name, but he was a great collector and had a famous Highland castle, where somebody had been murdered, and which she herself had visited (by moonlight) when she had travelled in Scotland as a girl. The episode had in short been one of the most interesting "experiences" of a tour almost chromo-lithographic in vivacity of impression; and they had always meant to go back to Brussels for the sake of reliving so picturesque a moment. Circumstances (of which the narrator's surroundings declared the nature) had persistently interfered with the projected return to Europe, and the picture had grown doubly valuable as representing the high-water mark of their artistic emotions. Mrs. Fontage's moist eye caressed the canvas. "There is only," she added with a perceptible effort, "one slight drawback: the picture is not signed. But for that the Countess, of course, would have sold it to a museum. All the connoisseurs who have seen it pronounce it an undoubted Rembrandt, in the artist's best manner; but the museums"—she arched her brows in smiling recognition of a well-known weakness—"give the preference to signed examples—"

Mrs. Fontage's words evoked so touching a vision of the young tourists of fifty years ago, entrusting to an accomplished and versatile courier the direction of their helpless zeal for art, that I lost sight for a moment of the point at issue. The old Belgian Countess, the wealthy Duke with a feudal castle in Scotland, Mrs. Fontage's own maiden pilgrimage to Arthur's Seat and Holyrood, all the accessories of the naïf transaction, seemed a part of that vanished Europe to which our young race carried its indiscriminate ardors, its tender romantic credulity: the legendary castellated Europe of

keepsakes, brigands and old masters, that compensated, by one such "experience" as Mrs. Fontage's, for an after-life of æsthetic privation.

I was restored to the present by Eleanor's looking at her watch. The action mutely conveyed that something was expected of me. I risked the temporizing statement that the picture was very interesting; but Mrs. Fontage's polite assent revealed the poverty of the expedient. Eleanor's impatience overflowed.

"You would like my cousin to give you an idea of its value?" she suggested.

Mrs. Fontage grew more erect. "No one," she corrected with great gentleness, "can know its value quite as well as I, who live with it—"

We murmured our hasty concurrence.

"But it might be interesting to hear"—she addressed herself to me—"as a mere matter of curiosity—what estimate would be put on it from the purely commercial point of view—if such a term may be used in speaking of a work of art."

I sounded a note of deprecation.

"Oh, I understand, of course," she delicately anticipated me, "that that could never be *your* view, your personal view; but since occasions *may* arise—do arise—when it becomes necessary to—to put a price on the priceless, as it were—I have thought—Miss Copt has suggested—"

"Some day," Eleanor encouraged her, "you might feel that the picture ought to belong to some one who has more—more opportunity of showing it—letting it be seen by the public—for educational reasons—"

"I have tried," Mrs. Fontage admitted, "to see it in that light."

The crucial moment was upon me. To escape the challenge of Mrs. Fontage's brilliant composure I turned once more to the picture. If my courage needed reinforcement, the picture amply furnished it. Looking at that lamentable canvas seemed the surest way of gathering strength to denounce it; but behind me, all the while, I felt Mrs. Fontage's shuddering pride drawn up in a final effort of self-

defense. I hated myself for my sentimental perversion of the situation. Reason argued that it was more cruel to deceive Mrs. Fontage than to tell her the truth; but that merely proved the inferiority of reason to instinct in situations involving any concession to the emotions. Along with her faith in the Rembrandt I must destroy not only the whole fabric of Mrs. Fontage's past, but even that life-long habit of acquiescence in untested formulas that makes the best part of the average feminine strength. I guessed the episode of the picture to be inextricably interwoven with the traditions and convictions which served to veil Mrs. Fontage's destitution not only from others but from herself. Viewed in that light the Rembrandt had perhaps been worth its purchase-money; and I regretted that works of art do not commonly sell on the merit of the moral support they may have rendered.

From this unavailing flight I was recalled by the sense that something must be done. To place a fictitious value on the picture was at best a provisional measure; while the brutal alternative of advising Mrs. Fontage to sell it for a hundred dollars at least afforded an opening to the charitably disposed purchaser. I intended, if other resources failed, to put myself forward in that light; but delicacy of course forbade my coupling my unflattering estimate of the Rembrandt with an immediate offer to buy it. All I could do was to inflict the wound: the healing unguent must be withheld for later application.

I turned to Mrs. Fontage, who sat motionless, her finely-lined cheeks touched with an expectant color, her eyes averted from the picture which was so evidently the one object they beheld.

"My dear madam—" I began. Her vivid smile was like a light held up to dazzle me. It shrouded every alternative in darkness and I had the flurried sense of having lost my way among the intricacies of my contention. Of a sudden I felt the hopelessness of finding a crack in her impenetrable conviction. My words slipped from me like broken weapons. "The picture," I faltered, "would of course be worth more if

it were signed. As it is, I—I hardly think—on a conservative estimate—it can be valued at—at more—than—a thousand dollars, say—”

My deflected argument ran on somewhat aimlessly till it found itself plunging full tilt against the barrier of Mrs. Fontage’s silence. She sat as impassive as though I had not spoken. Eleanor loosed a few fluttering words of congratulation and encouragement, but their flight was suddenly cut short. Mrs. Fontage had risen with a certain solemnity.

“I could never,” she said gently—her gentleness was adamant—“under any circumstances whatever, consider, for a moment even, the possibility of parting with the picture at such a price.”

II

Within three weeks a tremulous note from Mrs. Fontage requested the favor of another visit. If the writing was tremulous, however, the writer’s tone was firm. She named her own day and hour, without the conventional reference to her visitor’s convenience.

My first impulse was to turn the note over to Eleanor. I had acquitted myself of my share in the ungrateful business of coming to Mrs. Fontage’s aid, and if, as her letter denoted, she had now yielded to the closer pressure of need, the business of finding a purchaser for the Rembrandt might well be left to my cousin’s ingenuity. But here conscience put in the uncomfortable reminder that it was I who, in putting a price on the picture, had raised the real obstacle in the way of Mrs. Fontage’s rescue. No one would give a thousand dollars for the Rembrandt; but to tell Mrs. Fontage so had become as unthinkable as murder. I had, in fact, on returning from my first inspection of the picture, refrained from imparting to Eleanor my opinion of its value. Eleanor is porous, and I knew that sooner or later the unnecessary truth would exude through the loose texture of her dissimulation. Not infrequently she thus creates the misery she alleviates; and I have sometimes suspected her of paining people in order that she might be sorry for them. I had, at all events, cut off

retreat in Eleanor's direction; and the remaining alternative carried me straight to Mrs. Fontage.

She received me with the same commanding sweetness. The room was even barer than before—I believe the carpet was gone—but her manner built up about her a palace to which I was welcomed with high state; and it was as a mere incident of the ceremony that I was presently made aware of her decision to sell the Rembrandt. My previous unsuccess in planning how to deal with Mrs. Fontage had warned me to leave my farther course to chance; and I listened to her explanation with complete detachment. She had resolved to travel for her health; her doctor advised it, and as her absence might be indefinitely prolonged she had reluctantly decided to part with the picture in order to avoid the expense of storage and insurance. Her voice drooped at the admission, and she hurried on, detailing the vague itinerary of a journey that was to combine long-promised visits to impatient friends with various “interesting opportunities” less definitely specified. The poor lady's skill in rearing a screen of verbiage about her enforced avowal had distracted me from my own share in the situation, and it was with dismay that I suddenly caught the drift of her assumptions. She expected me to buy the Rembrandt for the Museum; she had taken my previous valuation as a tentative bid, and when I came to my senses she was in the act of accepting my offer.

Had I had a thousand dollars of my own to dispose of, the bargain would have been concluded on the spot; but I was in the impossible position of being materially unable to buy the picture and morally unable to tell her that it was not worth acquiring for the Museum.

I dashed into the first evasion in sight. I had no authority, I explained, to purchase pictures for the Museum without the consent of the committee.

Mrs. Fontage coped for a moment in silence with the incredible fact that I had rejected her offer; then she ventured, with a kind of pale precipitation: “But I understood—Miss Copt tells me that you

practically decide such matters for the committee." I could guess what the effort had cost her.

"My cousin is given to generalizations. My opinion may have some weight with the committee—"

"Well, then—" she timidly prompted.

"For that very reason I can't buy the picture."

She said, with a drooping note, "I don't understand."

"Yet you told me," I reminded her, "that you knew museums didn't buy unsigned pictures."

"Not for what they are worth! Every one knows that. But I—I understood—the price you named—" Her pride shuddered back from the abasement. "It's a misunderstanding then," she faltered.

To avoid looking at her, I glanced desperately at the Rembrandt. Could I—? But reason rejected the possibility. Even if the committee had been blind—and they all *were* but Crozier—I simply shouldn't have dared to do it. I stood up, feeling that to cut the matter short was the only alleviation within reach.

Mrs. Fontage had summoned her indomitable smile; but its brilliancy dropped, as I opened the door, like a candle blown out by a draught.

"If there's any one else—if you knew any one who would care to see the picture, I should be most happy—" She kept her eyes on me, and I saw that, in her case, it hurt less than to look at the Rembrandt. "I shall have to leave here, you know," she panted, "if nobody cares to have it—"

III

That evening at my club I had just succeeded in losing sight of Mrs. Fontage in the fumes of an excellent cigar, when a voice at my elbow evoked her harassing image.

"I want to talk to you," the speaker said, "about Mrs. Fontage's Rembrandt."

"There isn't any," I was about to growl; but looking up I

recognized the confiding countenance of Mr. Jefferson Rose.

Mr. Rose was known to me chiefly as a young man suffused with a vague enthusiasm for Virtue and my cousin Eleanor.

One glance at his glossy exterior conveyed the assurance that his morals were as immaculate as his complexion and his linen. Goodness exuded from his moist eye, his liquid voice, the warm damp pressure of his trustful hand. He had always struck me as one of the most uncomplicated organisms I had ever met. His ideas were as simple and inconsecutive as the propositions in a primer, and he spoke slowly, with a kind of uniformity of emphasis that made his words stand out like the raised type for the blind. An obvious incapacity for abstract conceptions made him peculiarly susceptible to the magic of generalization, and one felt he would have been at the mercy of any Cause that spelled itself with a capital letter. It was hard to explain how, with such a superabundance of merit, he managed to be a good fellow: I can only say that he performed the astonishing feat as naturally as he supported an invalid mother and two sisters on the slender salary of a banker's clerk. He sat down beside me with an air of bright expectancy.

"It's a remarkable picture, isn't it?" he said.

"You've seen it?"

"I've been so fortunate. Miss Copt was kind enough to get Mrs. Fontage's permission; we went this afternoon."

I inwardly wished that Eleanor had selected another victim; unless indeed the visit were part of a plan whereby some third person, better equipped for the cultivation of delusions, was to be made to think the Rembrandt remarkable. Knowing the limitations of Mr. Rose's resources I began to wonder if he had any rich aunts.

"And her buying it in that way, too," he went on with his limpid smile, "from that old Countess in Brussels, makes it all the more interesting, doesn't it? Miss Copt tells me it's very seldom old pictures can be traced back for more than a generation. I suppose the fact of Mrs. Fontage's knowing its history must add a good deal to its

value?”

Uncertain as to his drift, I said: “In her eyes it certainly appears to.”

Implications are lost on Mr. Rose, who glowingly continued: “That’s the reason why I wanted to talk to you about it—to consult you. Miss Copt tells me you value it at a thousand dollars.”

There was no denying this, and I grunted a reluctant assent.

“Of course,” he went on earnestly, “your valuation is based on the fact that the picture isn’t signed—Mrs. Fontage explained that; and it *does* make a difference, certainly. But the thing is—if the picture’s really good—ought one to take advantage—? I mean—one can see that Mrs. Fontage is in a tight place, and I wouldn’t for the world—”

My astonished state arrested him.

“*You* wouldn’t—?”

“I mean—you see, it’s just this way”; he coughed and blushed: “I can’t give more than a thousand dollars myself—it’s as big a sum as I can manage to scrape together—but before I make the offer I want to be sure I’m not standing in the way of her getting more money.”

My astonishment lapsed to dismay. “You’re going to buy the picture for a thousand dollars?”

His blush deepened. “Why, yes. It sounds rather absurd, I suppose. It isn’t much in my line, of course. I can see the picture’s very beautiful, but I’m no judge—it isn’t the kind of thing, naturally, that I could afford to go in for; but in this case I’m very glad to do what I can; the circumstances are so distressing; and knowing what you think of the picture I feel it’s a pretty safe investment—”

“I don’t think!” I blurted out.

“You—?”

“I don’t think the picture’s worth a thousand dollars; I don’t think it’s worth ten cents; I simply lied about it, that’s all.”

Mr. Rose looked as frightened as though I had charged him with the offense.

“Hang it, man, can’t you see how it happened? I saw the poor

woman's pride and happiness hung on her faith in that picture. I tried to make her understand that it was worthless—but she wouldn't; I tried to tell her so—but I couldn't. I behaved like a maudlin ass, but you shan't pay for my infernal bungling—you mustn't buy the picture!"

Mr. Rose sat silent, tapping one glossy boot-tip with another. Suddenly he turned on me a glance of stored intelligence. "But you know," he said good-humoredly, "I rather think I must."

"You haven't—already?"

"Oh, no; the offer's not made."

"Well, then—"

His look gathered a brighter significance.

"But if the picture's worth nothing, nobody will buy it—"

I groaned.

"Except," he continued, "some fellow like me, who doesn't know anything. *I* think it's lovely, you know; I mean to hang it in my mother's sitting-room." He rose and clasped my hand in his adhesive pressure. "I'm awfully obliged to you for telling me this; but perhaps you won't mind my asking you not to mention our talk to Miss Copt? It might bother her, you know, to think the picture isn't exactly up to the mark; and it won't make a rap of difference to me."

IV

Mr. Rose left me to a sleepless night. The next morning my resolve was formed, and it carried me straight to Mrs. Fontage's. She answered my knock by stepping out on the landing, and as she shut the door behind her I caught a glimpse of her devastated interior. She mentioned, with a careful avoidance of the note of pathos on which our last conversation had closed, that she was preparing to leave that afternoon; and the trunks obstructing the threshold showed that her preparations were nearly complete. They were, I felt certain, the same trunks that, strapped behind a rattling vettura, had accompanied the bride and groom on that memorable voyage of

discovery of which the booty had till recently adorned her walls; and there was a dim consolation in the thought that those early “finds” in coral and Swiss wood-carving, in lava and alabaster, still lay behind the worn locks, in the security of worthlessness.

Mrs. Fontage, on the landing, among her strapped and corded treasures, maintained the same air of stability that made it impossible, even under such conditions, to regard her flight as anything less dignified than a departure. It was the moral support of what she tacitly assumed that enabled me to set forth with proper deliberation the object of my visit; and she received my announcement with an absence of surprise that struck me as the very flower of tact. Under cover of these mutual assumptions the transaction was rapidly concluded; and it was not till the canvas passed into my hands that, as though the physical contact had unnerved her, Mrs. Fontage suddenly faltered. “It’s the giving it up —” she stammered, disguising herself to the last; and I hastened away from the collapse of her splendid effrontery.

I need hardly point out that I had acted impulsively, and that reaction from the most honorable impulses is sometimes attended by moral perturbation. My motives had indeed been mixed enough to justify some uneasiness, but this was allayed by the instinctive feeling that it is more venial to defraud an institution than a man. Since Mrs. Fontage had to be kept from starving by means not wholly defensible, it was better that the obligation should be borne by a rich institution than an impecunious youth. I doubt, in fact, if my scruples would have survived a night’s sleep, had they not been complicated by some uncertainty as to my own future. It was true that, subject to the purely formal assent of the committee, I had full power to buy for the Museum, and that the one member of the committee likely to dispute my decision was opportunely travelling in Europe; but the picture once in place I must face the risk of any expert criticism to which chance might expose it. I dismissed this contingency for future study, stored the Rembrandt in the cellar of the Museum, and

thanked heaven that Crozier was abroad.

Six months later he strolled into my office. I had just concluded, under conditions of exceptional difficulty, and on terms unexpectedly benign, the purchase of the great Bartley Reynolds; and this circumstance, by relegating the matter of the Rembrandt to a lower stratum of consciousness, enabled me to welcome Crozier with unmixed pleasure. My security was enhanced by his appearance. His smile was charged with amiable reminiscences, and I inferred that his trip had put him in the humor to approve of everything, or at least to ignore what fell short of his approval. I had therefore no uneasiness in accepting his invitation to dine that evening. It is always pleasant to dine with Crozier and never more so than when he is just back from Europe. His conversation gives even the food a flavor of the Café Anglais.

The repast was delightful, and it was not till we had finished a Camembert which he must have brought over with him, that my host said, in a tone of after-dinner perfunctoriness: "I see you've picked up a picture or two since I left."

I assented. "The Bartley Reynolds seemed too good an opportunity to miss, especially as the French government was after it. I think we got it cheap—"

"*Connu, connu*," said Crozier pleasantly. "I know all about the Reynolds. It was the biggest kind of a haul and I congratulate you. Best stroke of business we've done yet. But tell me about the other picture—the Rembrandt."

"I never said it was a Rembrandt." I could hardly have said why, but I felt distinctly annoyed with Crozier.

"Of course not. There's 'Rembrandt' on the frame, but I saw you'd modified it to 'Dutch School'; I apologize." He paused, but I offered no explanation. "What about it?" he went on. "Where did you pick it up?" As he leaned to the flame of the cigar-lighter his face seemed ruddy with enjoyment.

"I got it for a song," I said.

"A thousand, I think?"

"Have you seen it?" I asked abruptly.

"Went over the place this afternoon and found it in the cellar. Why hasn't it been hung, by the way?"

I paused a moment. "I'm waiting—"

"To—?"

"To have it varnished."

"Ah!" He leaned back and poured himself a second glass of Chartreuse. The smile he confided to its golden depths provoked me to challenge him with—

"What do you think of it?"

"The Rembrandt?" He lifted his eyes from the glass. "Just what you do."

"It isn't a Rembrandt."

"I apologize again. You call it, I believe, a picture of the same period?"

"I'm uncertain of the period."

"H'm." He glanced appreciatively along his cigar. "What are you certain of?"

"That it's a damned bad picture," I said savagely.

He nodded. "Just so. That's all we wanted to know."

"We?"

"We—I—the committee, in short. You see, my dear fellow, if you hadn't been certain it was a damned bad picture our position would have been a little awkward. As it is, my remaining duty—I ought to explain that in this matter I'm acting for the committee—is as simple as it's agreeable."

"I'll be hanged," I burst out, "if I understand one word you're saying!"

He fixed me with a kind of cruel joyousness. "You will—you will," he assured me; "at least you'll begin to, when you hear that I've seen Miss Copt."

"Miss Copt?"

"And that she has told me under what conditions the picture was bought."

"She doesn't know anything about the conditions! That is," I added, hastening to restrict the assertion, "she doesn't know my opinion of the picture." I thirsted for five minutes with Eleanor.

"Are you quite sure?" Crozier took me up. "Mr. Jefferson Rose does."

"Ah—I see."

"I thought you would," he reminded me. "As soon as I'd laid eyes on the Rembrandt—I beg your pardon!—I saw that it—well, required some explanation."

"You might have come to me."

"I meant to; but I happened to meet Miss Copt, whose encyclopædic information has often before been of service to me. I always go to Miss Copt when I want to look up anything; and I found she knew all about the Rembrandt."

"All?"

"Precisely. The knowledge was in fact causing her sleepless nights. Mr. Rose, who was suffering from the same form of insomnia, had taken her into his confidence, and she—ultimately—took me into hers."

"Of course!"

"I must ask you to do your cousin justice. She didn't speak till it became evident to her uncommonly quick perceptions that your buying the picture on its merits would have been infinitely worse for—for everybody—than your diverting a small portion of the Museum's funds to philanthropic uses. Then she told me the moving incident of Mr. Rose. Good fellow, Rose. And the old lady's case was desperate. Somebody had to buy that picture." I moved uneasily in my seat. "Wait a moment, will you? I haven't finished my cigar. There's a little head of Il Fiammingo's that you haven't seen, by the way; I picked it up the other day in Parma. We'll go in and have a look at it presently. But meanwhile what I want to say is that I've

been charged—in the most informal way—to express to you the committee’s appreciation of your admirable promptness and energy in capturing the Bartley Reynolds. We shouldn’t have got it at all if you hadn’t been uncommonly wide-awake, and to get it at such a price is a double triumph. We’d have thought nothing of a few more thousands—”

“I don’t see,” I impatiently interposed, “that, as far as I’m concerned, that alters the case.”

“The case—?”

“Of Mrs. Fontage’s Rembrandt. I bought the picture because, as you say, the situation was desperate, and I couldn’t raise a thousand myself. What I did was of course indefensible; but the money shall be refunded to-morrow—”

Crozier raised a protesting hand. “Don’t interrupt me when I’m talking *ex cathedrâ*. The money’s been refunded already. The fact is, the Museum has sold the Rembrandt.”

I stared at him wildly. “Sold it? To whom?”

“Why—to the committee.—Hold on a bit, please.—Won’t you take another cigar? Then perhaps I can finish what I’ve got to say.—Why, my dear fellow, the committee’s under an obligation to you—that’s the way we look at it. I’ve investigated Mrs. Fontage’s case, and—well, the picture had to be bought. She’s eating meat now, I believe, for the first time in a year. And they’d have turned her out into the street that very day, your cousin tells me. Something had to be done at once, and you’ve simply given a number of well-to-do and self-indulgent gentlemen the opportunity of performing, at very small individual expense, a meritorious action in the nick of time. That’s the first thing I’ve got to thank you for. And then—you’ll remember, please, that I have the floor—that I’m still speaking for the committee—and secondly, as a slight recognition of your services in securing the Bartley Reynolds at a very much lower figure than we were prepared to pay, we beg you—the committee begs you—to accept the gift of Mrs. Fontage’s Rembrandt. Now we’ll go in and

look at that little head. . . .”

The Moving Finger

THE NEWS of Mrs. Grancy's death came to me with the shock of an immense blunder—one of fate's most irretrievable acts of vandalism. It was as though all sorts of renovating forces had been checked by the clogging of that one wheel. Not that Mrs. Grancy contributed any perceptible momentum to the social machine: her unique distinction was that of filling to perfection her special place in the world. So many people are like badly-composed statues, over-lapping their niches at one point and leaving them vacant at another. Mrs. Grancy's niche was her husband's life; and if it be argued that the space was not large enough for its vacancy to leave a very big gap, I can only say that, at the last resort, such dimensions must be determined by finer instruments than any ready-made standard of utility. Ralph Grancy's was in short a kind of disembodied usefulness: one of those constructive influences that, instead of crystallizing into definite forms, remain as it were a medium for the development of clear thinking and fine feeling. He faithfully irrigated his own dusty patch of life, and the fruitful moisture stole far beyond his boundaries. If, to carry on the metaphor, Grancy's life was a sedulously-cultivated enclosure, his wife was the flower he had planted in its midst—the embowering tree, rather, which gave him rest and shade at its foot and the wind of dreams in its upper branches.

We had all—his small but devoted band of followers—known a moment when it seemed likely that Grancy would fail us. We had watched him pitted against one stupid obstacle after another—ill-

health, poverty, misunderstanding and, worst of all for a man of his texture, his first wife's soft insidious egotism. We had seen him sinking under the leaden embrace of her affection like a swimmer in a drowning clutch; but just as we despaired he had always come to the surface again, blinded, panting, but striking out fiercely for the shore. When at last her death released him it became a question as to how much of the man she had carried with her. Left alone, he revealed numb withered patches, like a tree from which a parasite has been stripped. But gradually he began to put out new leaves; and when he met the lady who was to become his second wife—his one *real* wife, as his friends reckoned—the whole man burst into flower.

The second Mrs. Grancy was past thirty when he married her, and it was clear that she had harvested that crop of middle joy which is rooted in young despair. But if she had lost the surface of eighteen she had kept its inner light; if her cheek lacked the gloss of immaturity her eyes were young with the stored youth of half a lifetime. Grancy had first known her somewhere in the East—I believe she was the sister of one of our consuls out there—and when he brought her home to New York she came among us as a stranger. The idea of Grancy's remarriage had been a shock to us all. After one such calcining most men would have kept out of the fire; but we agreed that he was predestined to sentimental blunders, and we awaited with resignation the embodiment of his latest mistake. Then Mrs. Grancy came—and we understood. She was the most beautiful and the most complete of explanations. We shuffled our defeated omniscience out of sight and gave it hasty burial under a prodigality of welcome. For the first time in years we had Grancy off our minds. "He'll do something great now!" the least sanguine of us prophesied; and our sentimentalist emended: "He *has* done it—in marrying her!"

It was Claydon, the portrait-painter, who risked this hyperbole; and who soon afterward, at the happy husband's request, prepared to defend it in a portrait of Mrs. Grancy. We were all—even Claydon—ready to concede that Mrs. Grancy's unwontedness was in some

degree a matter of environment. Her graces were complementary and it needed the mate's call to reveal the flash of color beneath her neutral-tinted wings. But if she needed Grancy to interpret her, how much greater was the service she rendered him! Claydon professionally described her as the right frame for him; but if she defined she also enlarged, if she threw the whole into perspective she also cleared new ground, opened fresh vistas, reclaimed whole areas of activity that had run to waste under the harsh husbandry of privation. This interaction of sympathies was not without its visible expression. Claydon was not alone in maintaining that Grancy's presence—or indeed the mere mention of his name—had a perceptible effect on his wife's appearance. It was as though a light were shifted, a curtain drawn back, as though, to borrow another of Claydon's metaphors, Love the indefatigable artist were perpetually seeking a happier "pose" for his model. In this interpretative light Mrs. Grancy acquired the charm which makes some women's faces like a book of which the last page is never turned. There was always something new to read in her eyes. What Claydon read there—or at least such scattered hints of the ritual as reached him through the sanctuary doors—his portrait in due course declared to us. When the picture was exhibited it was at once acclaimed as his masterpiece; but the people who knew Mrs. Grancy smiled and said it was flattered. Claydon, however, had not set out to paint *their* Mrs. Grancy—or ours even—but Ralph's; and Ralph knew his own at a glance. At the first confrontation he saw that Claydon had understood. As for Mrs. Grancy, when the finished picture was shown to her she turned to the painter and said simply: "Ah, you've done me facing the east!"

The picture, then, for all its value, seemed a mere incident in the unfolding of their double destiny, a foot-note to the illuminated text of their lives. It was not till afterward that it acquired the significance of last words spoken on a threshold never to be recrossed. Grancy, a year after his marriage, had given up his town

house and carried his bliss an hour's journey away, to a little place among the hills. His various duties and interests brought him frequently to New York but we necessarily saw him less often than when his house had served as the rallying-point of kindred enthusiasms. It seemed a pity that such an influence should be withdrawn, but we all felt that his long arrears of happiness should be paid in whatever coin he chose. The distance from which the fortunate couple radiated warmth on us was not too great for friendship to traverse; and our conception of a glorified leisure took the form of Sundays spent in the Grancys' library, with its sedative rural outlook and the portrait of Mrs. Grancy illuminating its studious walls. The picture was at its best in that setting; and we used to accuse Claydon of visiting Mrs. Grancy in order to see her portrait. He met this by declaring that the portrait *was* Mrs. Grancy; and there were moments when the statement seemed unanswerable. One of us, indeed—I think it must have been the novelist—said that Claydon had been saved from falling in love with Mrs. Grancy only by falling in love with his picture of her; and it was noticeable that he, to whom his finished work was no more than the shed husk of future effort, showed a perennial tenderness for this one achievement. We smiled afterward to think how often, when Mrs. Grancy was in the room, her presence reflecting itself in our talk like a gleam of sky in a hurrying current, Claydon, averted from the real woman, would sit as it were listening to the picture. His attitude, at the time, seemed only a part of the unusualness of those picturesque afternoons, when the most familiar combinations of life underwent a magical change. Some human happiness is a landlocked lake; but the Grancys' was an open sea, stretching a buoyant and illimitable surface to the voyaging interests of life. There was room and to spare on those waters for all our separate ventures; and always, beyond the sunset, a mirage of the fortunate isles toward which our prows were bent.

It was in Rome that, three years later, I heard of her death. The notice said "suddenly"; I was glad of that. I was glad too—basely perhaps—to be away from Grancy at a time when silence must have seemed obtuse and speech derisive.

I was still in Rome when, a few months afterward, he suddenly arrived there. He had been appointed secretary of legation at Constantinople and was on the way to his post. He had taken the place, he said frankly, "to get away." Our relations with the Porte held out a prospect of hard work, and that, he explained, was what he needed. He could never be satisfied to sit down among the ruins. I saw that, like most of us in moments of extreme moral tension, he was playing a part, behaving as he thought it became a man to behave in the eye of disaster. The instinctive posture of grief is a shuffling compromise between defiance and prostration; and pride feels the need of striking a worthier attitude in face of such a foe. Grancy, by nature musing and retrospective, had chosen the rôle of the man of action, who answers blow for blow and opposes a mailed front to the thrusts of destiny; and the completeness of the equipment testified to his inner weakness. We talked only of what we were not thinking of, and parted, after a few days, with a sense of relief that proved the inadequacy of friendship to perform, in such cases, the office assigned to it by tradition.

Soon afterward my own work called me home, but Grancy remained several years in Europe. International diplomacy kept its promise of giving him work to do, and during the year in which he acted as *chargé d'affaires* he acquitted himself, under trying conditions, with conspicuous zeal and discretion. A political redistribution of matter removed him from office just as he had proved his usefulness to the government; and the following summer I heard that he had come home and was down at his place in the country.

On my return to town I wrote him and his reply came by the next

post. He answered as it were in his natural voice, urging me to spend the following Sunday with him, and suggesting that I should bring down any of the old set who could be persuaded to join me. I thought this a good sign, and yet—shall I own it?—I was vaguely disappointed. Perhaps we are apt to feel that our friends' sorrows should be kept like those historic monuments from which the encroaching ivy is periodically removed.

That very evening at the club I ran across Claydon. I told him of Grancy's invitation and proposed that we should go down together; but he pleaded an engagement. I was sorry, for I had always felt that he and I stood nearer Ralph than the others, and if the old Sundays were to be renewed I should have preferred that we two should spend the first alone with him. I said as much to Claydon and offered to fit my time to his; but he met this by a general refusal.

"I don't want to go to Grancy's," he said bluntly. I waited a moment, but he appended no qualifying clause.

"You've seen him since he came back?" I finally ventured. Claydon nodded.

"And is he so awfully bad?"

"Bad? No: he's all right."

"All right? How can he be, unless he's changed beyond all recognition?"

"Oh, you'll recognize *him*," said Claydon, with a puzzling deflection of emphasis.

His ambiguity was beginning to exasperate me, and I felt myself shut out from some knowledge to which I had as good a right as he.

"You've been down there already, I suppose?"

"Yes; I've been down there."

"And you've done with each other—the partnership is dissolved?"

"Done with each other? I wish to God we had!" He rose nervously and tossed aside the review from which my approach had diverted him. "Look here," he said, standing before me, "Ralph's the best fellow going and there's nothing under heaven I wouldn't do for him

—short of going down there again.” And with that he walked out of the room.

Claydon was incalculable enough for me to read a dozen different meanings into his words; but none of my interpretations satisfied me. I determined, at any rate, to seek no farther for a companion; and the next Sunday I travelled down to Grancy’s alone. He met me at the station and I saw at once that he had changed since our last meeting. Then he had been in fighting array, but now if he and grief still housed together it was no longer as enemies. Physically the transformation was as marked but less reassuring. If the spirit triumphed the body showed its scars. At five-and-forty he was gray and stooping, with the tired gait of an old man. His serenity, however, was not the resignation of age. I saw that he did not mean to drop out of the game. Almost immediately he began to speak of our old interests; not with an effort, as at our former meeting, but simply and naturally, in the tone of a man whose life has flowed back into its normal channels. I remembered, with a touch of self-reproach, how I had distrusted his reconstructive powers; but my admiration for his reserved force was now tinged by the sense that, after all, such happiness as his ought to have been paid with his last coin. The feeling grew as we neared the house and I found how inextricably his wife was interwoven with my remembrance of the place: how the whole scene was but an extension of that vivid presence.

Within doors nothing was changed, and my hand would have dropped without surprise into her welcoming clasp. It was luncheon-time, and Grancy led me at once to the dining-room, where the walls, the furniture, the very plate and porcelain, seemed a mirror in which a moment since her face had been reflected. I wondered whether Grancy, under the recovered tranquillity of his smile, concealed the same sense of her nearness, saw perpetually between himself and the actual her bright unappeasable ghost. He spoke of her once or twice, in an easy incidental way, and her name seemed

to hang in the air after he had uttered it, like a chord that continues to vibrate. If he felt her presence it was evidently as an enveloping medium, the moral atmosphere in which he breathed. I had never before known how completely the dead may survive.

After luncheon we went for a long walk through the autumnal fields and woods, and dusk was falling when we reentered the house. Grancy led the way to the library, where, at this hour, his wife had always welcomed us back to a bright fire and a cup of tea. The room faced the west, and held a clear light of its own after the rest of the house had grown dark. I remembered how young she had looked in this pale gold light, which irradiated her eyes and hair, or silhouetted her girlish outline as she passed before the windows. Of all the rooms the library was most peculiarly hers; and here I felt that her nearness might take visible shape. Then, all in a moment, as Grancy opened the door, the feeling vanished and a kind of resistance met me on the threshold. I looked about me. Was the room changed? Had some desecrating hand effaced the traces of her presence? No; here too the setting was undisturbed. My feet sank into the same deep-piled Daghestan; the book-shelves took the firelight on the same rows of rich subdued bindings; her arm-chair stood in its old place near the tea-table; and from the opposite wall her face confronted me.

Her face—but *was* it hers? I moved nearer and stood looking up at the portrait. Grancy's glance had followed mine and I heard him move to my side.

"You see a change in it?" he said.

"What does it mean?" I asked.

"It means—that five years have passed."

"Over *her*?"

"Why not?—Look at me!" He pointed to his gray hair and furrowed temples. "What do you think kept *her* so young? It was happiness! But now—" he looked up at her with infinite tenderness. "I like her better so," he said. "It's what she would have wished."

"Have wished?"

"That we should grow old together. Do you think she would have wanted to be left behind?"

I stood speechless, my gaze travelling from his worn grief-beaten features to the painted face above. It was not furrowed like his; but a veil of years seemed to have descended on it. The bright hair had lost its elasticity, the cheek its clearness, the brow its light: the whole woman had waned.

Grancy laid his hand on my arm. "You don't like it?" he said sadly.

"Like it? I—I've lost her!" I burst out.

"And I've found her," he answered.

"In *that*?" I cried with a reproachful gesture.

"Yes; in that." He swung round on me almost defiantly. "The other had become a sham, a lie! This is the way she would have looked—does look, I mean. Claydon ought to know, oughtn't he?"

I turned suddenly. "Did Claydon do this for you?" Grancy nodded.

"Since your return?"

"Yes. I sent for him after I'd been back a week—." He turned away and gave a thrust to the smouldering fire. I followed, glad to leave the picture behind me. Grancy threw himself into a chair near the hearth, so that the light fell on his sensitive variable face. He leaned his head back, shading his eyes with his hand, and began to speak.

III

"You fellows knew enough of my early history to guess what my second marriage meant to me. I say guess, because no one could understand—really. I've always had a feminine streak in me, I suppose: the need of a pair of eyes that should see with me, of a pulse that should keep time with mine. Life is a big thing, of course; a magnificent spectacle; but I got so tired of looking at it alone! Still, it's always good to live, and I had plenty of happiness—of the evolved kind. What I'd never had a taste of was the simple unconscious sort that one breathes in like the air. . .

“Well—I met her. It was like finding the climate in which I was meant to live. You know what she was—how indefinitely she multiplied one’s points of contact with life, how she lit up the caverns and bridged the abysses! Well, I swear to you (though I suppose the sense of all that was latent in me) that what I used to think of on my way home at the end of the day, was simply that when I opened this door she’d be sitting over there, with the lamp-light falling in a particular way on one little curl in her neck. . . . When Claydon painted her he caught just the look she used to lift to mine when I came in—I’ve wondered, sometimes, at his knowing how she looked when she and I were alone.—How I rejoiced in that picture! I used to say to her, ‘You’re my prisoner now—I shall never lose you. If you grew tired of me and left me you’d leave your real self there on the wall!’ It was always one of our jokes that she was going to grow tired of me—

“Three years of it—and then she died. It was so sudden that there was no change, no diminution. It was as if she had suddenly become fixed, immovable, like her own portrait: as if Time had ceased at its happiest hour, just as Claydon had thrown down his brush one day and said, ‘I can’t do better than that.’

“I went away, as you know, and stayed over there five years. I worked as hard as I knew how, and after the first black months a little light stole in on me. From thinking that she would have been interested in what I was doing I came to feel that she *was* interested—that she was there and that she knew. I’m not talking any psychical jargon—I’m simply trying to express the sense I had that an influence so full, so abounding as hers couldn’t pass like a spring shower. We had so lived into each other’s hearts and minds that the consciousness of what she would have thought and felt illuminated all I did. At first she used to come back shyly, tentatively, as though not sure of finding me; then she stayed longer and longer, till at last she became again the very air I breathed. . . . There were bad moments, of course, when her nearness mocked me with the loss of

the real woman; but gradually the distinction between the two was effaced and the mere thought of her grew warm as flesh and blood.

“Then I came home. I landed in the morning and came straight down here. The thought of seeing her portrait possessed me and my heart beat like a lover’s as I opened the library door. It was in the afternoon and the room was full of light. It fell on her picture—the picture of a young and radiant woman. She smiled at me coldly across the distance that divided us. I had the feeling that she didn’t even recognize me. And then I caught sight of myself in the mirror over there—a gray-haired broken man whom she had never known!

“For a week we two lived together—the strange woman and the strange man. I used to sit night after night and question her smiling face; but no answer ever came. What did she know of me, after all? We were irrevocably separated by the five years of life that lay between us. At times, as I sat here, I almost grew to hate her; for her presence had driven away my gentle ghost, the real wife who had wept, aged, struggled with me during those awful years. . . It was the worst loneliness I’ve ever known. Then, gradually, I began to notice a look of sadness in the picture’s eyes; a look that seemed to say: ‘Don’t you see that *I* am lonely too?’ And all at once it came over me how she would have hated to be left behind! I remembered her comparing life to a heavy book that could not be read with ease unless two people held it together; and I thought how impatiently her hand would have turned the pages that divided us!—So the idea came to me: ‘It’s the picture that stands between us; the picture that is dead, and not my wife. To sit in this room is to keep watch beside a corpse.’ As this feeling grew on me the portrait became like a beautiful mausoleum in which she had been buried alive: I could hear her beating against the painted walls and crying to me faintly for help. . .

“One day I found I couldn’t stand it any longer and I sent for Claydon. He came down and I told him what I’d been through and what I wanted him to do. At first he refused point-blank to touch the

picture. The next morning I went off for a long tramp, and when I came home I found him sitting here alone. He looked at me sharply for a moment and then he said: 'I've changed my mind; I'll do it.' I arranged one of the north rooms as a studio and he shut himself up there for a day; then he sent for me. The picture stood there as you see it now—it was as though she'd met me on the threshold and taken me in her arms! I tried to thank him, to tell him what it meant to me, but he cut me short.

“ 'There's an up train at five, isn't there?' he asked. 'I'm booked for a dinner to-night. I shall just have time to make a bolt for the station and you can send my traps after me.' I haven't seen him since.

“I can guess what it cost him to lay hands on his masterpiece; but, after all, to him it was only a picture lost, to me it was my wife regained!”

IV

After that, for ten years or more, I watched the strange spectacle of a life of hopeful and productive effort based on the structure of a dream. There could be no doubt to those who saw Grancy during this period that he drew his strength and courage from the sense of his wife's mystic participation in his task. When I went back to see him a few months later I found the portrait had been removed from the library and placed in a small study up-stairs, to which he had transferred his desk and a few books. He told me he always sat there when he was alone, keeping the library for his Sunday visitors. Those who missed the portrait of course made no comment on its absence, and the few who were in his secret respected it. Gradually all his old friends had gathered about him and our Sunday afternoons regained something of their former character; but Claydon never reappeared among us.

As I look back now I see that Grancy must have been failing from the time of his return home. His invincible spirit belied and disguised the signs of weakness that afterward asserted themselves in my

remembrance of him. He seemed to have an inexhaustible fund of life to draw on, and more than one of us was a pensioner on his superfluity.

Nevertheless, when I came back one summer from my European holiday and heard that he had been at the point of death, I understood at once that we had believed him well only because he wished us to.

I hastened down to the country and found him midway in a slow convalescence. I felt then that he was lost to us and he read my thought at a glance.

"Ah," he said, "I'm an old man now and no mistake. I suppose we shall have to go half-speed after this; but we shan't need towing just yet!"

The plural pronoun struck me, and involuntarily I looked up at Mrs. Grancy's portrait. Line by line I saw my fear reflected in it. It was the face of a woman *who knows that her husband is dying*. My heart stood still at the thought of what Claydon had done.

Grancy had followed my glance. "Yes, it's changed her," he said quietly. "For months, you know, it was touch and go with me—we had a long fight of it, and it was worse for her than for me." After a pause he added: "Claydon has been very kind; he's so busy nowadays that I seldom see him, but when I sent for him the other day he came down at once."

I was silent and we spoke no more of Grancy's illness; but when I took leave it seemed like shutting him in alone with his death-warrant.

The next time I went down to see him he looked much better. It was a Sunday and he received me in the library, so that I did not see the portrait again. He continued to improve and toward spring we began to feel that, as he had said, he might yet travel a long way without being towed.

One evening, on returning to town after a visit which had confirmed my sense of reassurance, I found Claydon dining alone at

the club. He asked me to join him and over the coffee our talk turned to his work.

"If you're not too busy," I said at length, "you ought to make time to go down to Grancy's again."

He looked up quickly. "Why?" he asked.

"Because he's quite well again," I returned with a touch of cruelty. "His wife's prognostications were mistaken."

Claydon stared at me a moment. "Oh, *she* knows," he affirmed with a smile that chilled me.

"You mean to leave the portrait as it is then?" I persisted.

He shrugged his shoulders. "He hasn't sent for me yet!"

A waiter came up with the cigars and Claydon rose and joined another group.

It was just a fortnight later that Grancy's housekeeper telegraphed for me. She met me at the station with the news that he had been "taken bad" and that the doctors were with him. I had to wait for some time in the deserted library before the medical men appeared. They had the baffled manner of empirics who have been superseded by the great Healer; and I lingered only long enough to hear that Grancy was not suffering and that my presence could do him no harm.

I found him seated in his arm-chair in the little study. He held out his hand with a smile.

"You see she was right after all," he said.

"She?" I repeated, perplexed for the moment.

"My wife." He indicated the picture. "Of course I knew she had no hope from the first. I saw that"—he lowered his voice—"after Claydon had been here. But I wouldn't believe it at first!"

I caught his hands in mine. "For God's sake don't believe it now!" I adjured him.

He shook his head gently. "It's too late," he said. "I might have known that she knew."

“But, Grancy, listen to me,” I began; and then I stopped. What could I say that would convince him? There was no common ground of argument on which we could meet; and after all it would be easier for him to die feeling that she *had* known. Strangely enough, I saw that Claydon had missed his mark. . .

V

Grancy’s will named me as one of his executors; and my associate, having other duties on his hands, begged me to assume the task of carrying out our friend’s wishes. This placed me under the necessity of informing Claydon that the portrait of Mrs. Grancy had been bequeathed to him; and he replied by the next post that he would send for the picture at once. I was staying in the deserted house when the portrait was taken away; and as the door closed on it I felt that Grancy’s presence had vanished too. Was it his turn to follow her now, and could one ghost haunt another?

After that, for a year or two, I heard nothing more of the picture, and though I met Claydon from time to time we had little to say to each other. I had no definable grievance against the man and I tried to remember that he had done a fine thing in sacrificing his best picture to a friend; but my resentment had all the tenacity of unreason.

One day, however, a lady whose portrait he had just finished begged me to go with her to see it. To refuse was impossible, and I went with the less reluctance that I knew I was not the only friend she had invited. The others were all grouped around the easel when I entered, and after contributing my share to the chorus of approval I turned away and began to stroll about the studio. Claydon was something of a collector and his things were generally worth looking at. The studio was a long tapestried room with a curtained archway at one end. The curtains were looped back, showing a smaller apartment, with books and flowers and a few fine bits of bronze and

porcelain. The tea-table standing in this inner room proclaimed that it was open to inspection, and I wandered in. A *bleu poudré* vase first attracted me; then I turned to examine a slender bronze Ganymede, and in so doing found myself face to face with Mrs. Grancy's portrait. I stared up at her blankly and she smiled back at me in all the recovered radiance of youth. The artist had effaced every trace of his later touches and the original picture had reappeared. It throned alone on the panelled wall, asserting a brilliant supremacy over its carefully-chosen surroundings. I felt in an instant that the whole room was tributary to it: that Claydon had heaped his treasures at the feet of the woman he loved. Yes—it was the woman he had loved and not the picture; and my instinctive resentment was explained.

Suddenly I felt a hand on my shoulder.

"Ah, how could you?" I cried, turning on him.

"How could I?" he retorted. "How could I *not*? Doesn't she belong to me now?"

I moved away impatiently.

"Wait a moment," he said with a detaining gesture. "The others have gone and I want to say a word to you.—Oh, I know what you've thought of me—I can guess! You think I killed Grancy, I suppose?"

I was startled by his sudden vehemence. "I think you tried to do a cruel thing," I said.

"Ah—what a little way you others see into life!" he murmured. "Sit down a moment—here, where we can look at her—and I'll tell you."

He threw himself on the ottoman beside me and sat gazing up at the picture, with his hands clasped about his knee.

"Pygmalion," he began slowly, "turned his statue into a real woman; *I* turned my real woman into a picture. Small compensation, you think—but you don't know how much of a woman belongs to you after you've painted her!—Well, I made the best of it, at any rate—I gave her the best I had in me; and she gave me in return what such a woman gives by merely being. And after all she rewarded me enough by making me paint as I shall never paint again! There was

one side of her, though, that was mine alone, and that was her beauty; for no one else understood it. To Grancy even it was the mere expression of herself—what language is to thought. Even when he saw the picture he didn't guess my secret—he was so sure she was all his! As though a man should think he owned the moon because it was reflected in the pool at his door—

“Well—when he came home and sent for me to change the picture it was like asking me to commit murder. He wanted me to make an old woman of her—of her who had been so divinely, unchangeably young! As if any man who really loved a woman would ask her to sacrifice her youth and beauty for his sake! At first I told him I couldn't do it—but afterward, when he left me alone with the picture, something queer happened. I suppose it was because I was always so confoundedly fond of Grancy that it went against me to refuse what he asked. Anyhow, as I sat looking up at her, she seemed to say, ‘I'm not yours but his, and I want you to make me what he wishes.’ And so I did it. I could have cut my hand off when the work was done—I daresay he told you I never would go back and look at it. He thought I was too busy—he never understood. . .

“Well—and then last year he sent for me again—you remember. It was after his illness, and he told me he'd grown twenty years older and that he wanted her to grow older too—he didn't want her to be left behind. The doctors all thought he was going to get well at that time, and he thought so too; and so did I when I first looked at him. But when I turned to the picture—ah, now I don't ask you to believe me; but I swear it was *her* face that told me he was dying, and that she wanted him to know it! She had a message for him and she made me deliver it.”

He rose abruptly and walked toward the portrait; then he sat down beside me again.

“Cruel? Yes, it seemed so to me at first; and this time, if I resisted, it was for *his* sake and not for mine. But all the while I felt her eyes drawing me, and gradually she made me understand. If she'd been

there in the flesh (she seemed to say) wouldn't she have seen before any of us that he was dying? Wouldn't he have read the news first in her face? And wouldn't it be horrible if now he should discover it instead in strange eyes?—Well—that was what she wanted of me and I did it—I kept them together to the last!" He looked up at the picture again. "But now she belongs to me," he repeated. . .

Sanctuary

IT IS not often that youth allows itself to feel undividedly happy: the sensation is too much the result of selection and elimination to be within reach of the awakening clutch on life. But Kate Orme, for once, had yielded herself to happiness, letting it permeate every faculty as a spring rain soaks into a germinating meadow. There was nothing to account for this sudden sense of beatitude; but was it not this precisely which made it so irresistible, so overwhelming? There had been, within the last two months—since her engagement to Denis Peyton—no distinct addition to the sum of her happiness, and no possibility, she would have affirmed, of adding perceptibly to a total already incalculable. Inwardly and outwardly the conditions of her life were unchanged; but whereas, before, the air had been full of flitting wings, now they seemed to pause over her and she could trust herself to their shelter.

Many influences had combined to build up the centre of brooding peace in which she found herself. Her nature answered to the finest vibrations, and at first her joy in loving had been too great not to bring with it a certain confusion, a readjusting of the whole scenery of life. She found herself in a new country, wherein he who had led her there was least able to be her guide. There were moments when she felt that the first stranger in the street could have interpreted her happiness for her more easily than Denis. Then, as her eye adapted itself, as the lines flowed into each other, opening deep vistas upon new horizons, she began to enter into possession of her kingdom, to entertain the actual sense of its belonging to her. But she had never

before felt that she also belonged to it; and this was the feeling which now came to complete her happiness, to give it the hallowing sense of permanence.

She rose from the writing-table where, list in hand, she had been going over the wedding-invitations, and walked toward the drawing-room window. Everything about her seemed to contribute to that rare harmony of feeling which levied a tax on every sense. The large coolness of the room, its fine traditional air of spacious living, its outlook over field and woodland toward the lake lying under the silver bloom of September; the very scent of the late violets in a glass on the writing-table; the rosy-mauve masses of hydrangea in tubs along the terrace; the fall, now and then, of a leaf through the still air—all, somehow, were mingled in the suffusion of well-being that yet made them seem but so much dross upon its current.

The girl's smile prolonged itself at the sight of a figure approaching from the lower slopes above the lake. The path was a short cut from the Peyton place, and she had known that Denis would appear in it at about that hour. Her smile, however, was prolonged not so much by his approach as by her sense of the impossibility of communicating her mood to him. The feeling did not disturb her. She could not imagine sharing her deepest moods with any one, and the world in which she lived with Denis was too bright and spacious to admit of any sense of constraint. Her smile was in truth a tribute to that clear-eyed directness of his which was so often a refuge from her own complexities.

Denis Peyton was used to being met with a smile. He might have been pardoned for thinking smiles the habitual wear of the human countenance; and his estimate of life and of himself was necessarily tinged by the cordial terms on which they had always met each other. He had in fact found life, from the start, an uncommonly agreeable business, culminating fitly enough in his engagement to the only girl he had ever wished to marry, and the inheritance, from his unhappy step-brother, of a fortune which agreeably widened his

horizon. Such a combination of circumstances might well justify a young man in thinking himself of some account in the universe; and it seemed the final touch of fitness that the mourning which Denis still wore for poor Arthur should lend a new distinction to his somewhat florid good looks.

Kate Orme was not without an amused perception of her future husband's point of view; but she could enter into it with the tolerance which allows for the unconscious element in all our judgments. There was, for instance, no one more sentimentally humane than Denis's mother, the second Mrs. Peyton, a scented silvery person whose lavender silks and neutral-tinted manner expressed a mind with its blinds drawn down toward all the unpleasantnesses of life; yet it was clear that Mrs. Peyton saw a "dispensation" in the fact that her stepson had never married, and that his death had enabled Denis, at the right moment, to step gracefully into affluence. Was it not, after all, a sign of healthy-mindedness to take the gifts of the gods in this religious spirit, discovering fresh evidence of "design" in what had once seemed the sad fact of Arthur's inaccessibility to correction? Mrs. Peyton, beautifully conscious of having done her "best" for Arthur, would have thought it unchristian to repine at the providential failure of her efforts. Denis's deductions were, of course, a little less direct than his mother's. He had, besides, been fond of Arthur, and his efforts to keep the poor fellow straight had been less didactic and more spontaneous. Their result read itself, if not in any change in Arthur's character, at least in the revised wording of his will; and Denis's moral sense was pleasantly fortified by the discovery that it very substantially paid to be a good fellow.

The sense of general providentialness on which Mrs. Peyton reposed had in fact been confirmed by events which reduced Denis's mourning to a mere tribute of respect—since it would have been a mockery to deplore the disappearance of any one who had left behind him such an unsavory wake as poor Arthur. Kate did not

quite know what had happened: her father was as firmly convinced as Mrs. Peyton that young girls should not be admitted to any open discussion of life. She could only gather, from the silences and evasions amid which she moved, that a woman had turned up—a woman who was of course “dreadful,” and whose dreadfulness appeared to include a sort of shadowy claim upon Arthur. But the claim, whatever it was, had been promptly discredited. The whole question had vanished and the woman with it. The blinds were drawn again on the ugly side of things, and life was resumed on the usual assumption that no such side existed. Kate knew only that a darkness had crossed her sky and left it as unclouded as before.

Was it, perhaps, she now asked herself, the very lifting of the cloud—remote, unthreatening as it had been—which gave such new serenity to her heaven? It was horrible to think that one’s deepest security was a mere sense of escape—that happiness was no more than a reprieve. The perversity of such ideas was emphasized by Peyton’s approach. He had the gift of restoring things to their normal relations, of carrying one over the chasms of life through the closed tunnel of an incurious cheerfulness. All that was restless and questioning in the girl subsided in his presence, and she was content to take her love as a gift of grace, which began just where the office of reason ended. She was more than ever, to-day, in this mood of charmed surrender. More than ever he seemed the keynote of the accord between herself and life, the centre of a delightful complicity in every surrounding circumstance. One could not look at him without seeing that there was always a fair wind in his sails.

It was carrying him toward her, as usual, at a quick confident pace, which nevertheless lagged a little, she noticed, as he emerged from the beech-grove and struck across the lawn. He walked as though he were tired. She had meant to wait for him on the terrace, held in check by her usual inclination to linger on the threshold of her pleasures; but now something drew her toward him, and she went quickly down the steps and across the lawn.

"Denis, you look tired. I was afraid something had happened."

She had slipped her hand through his arm, and as they moved forward she glanced up at him, struck not so much by any new look in his face as by the fact that her approach had made no change in it.

"I am rather tired.—Is your father in?"

"Papa?" She looked up in surprise. "He went to town yesterday. Don't you remember?"

"Of course—I'd forgotten. You're alone, then?" She dropped his arm and stood before him. He was very pale now, with the furrowed look of extreme physical weariness.

"Denis—are you ill? *Has* anything happened?"

He forced a smile. "Yes—but you needn't look so frightened."

She drew a deep breath of reassurance. *He* was safe, after all! And all else, for a moment, seemed to swing below the rim of her world.

"Your mother—?" she then said, with a fresh start of fear.

"It's not my mother." They had reached the terrace, and he moved toward the house. "Let us go indoors. There's such a beastly glare out here."

He seemed to find relief in the cool obscurity of the drawing-room, where, after the brightness of the afternoon light, their faces were almost indistinguishable to each other. She sat down, and he moved a few paces away. Before the writing-table he paused to look at the neatly sorted heaps of wedding-cards.

"They are to be sent out to-morrow?"

"Yes."

He turned back and stood before her.

"It's about the woman," he began abruptly—"the woman who pretended to be Arthur's wife."

Kate started as at the clutch of an unacknowledged fear. "She *was* his wife, then?"

Peyton made an impatient movement of negation. "If she was, why didn't she prove it? She hadn't a shred of evidence. The courts rejected her appeal."

“Well, then—?”

“Well, she’s dead.” He paused, and the next words came with difficulty. “She and the child.”

“The child? There was a child?”

“Yes.”

Kate started up and then sank down. These were not things about which young girls were told. The confused sense of horror had been nothing to this first sharp edge of fact.

“And both are dead?”

“Yes.”

“How do you know? My father said she had gone away— gone back to the West—”

“So we thought. But this morning we found her.”

“Found her?”

He motioned toward the window. “Out there—in the lake.”

“Both?”

“Both.”

She drooped before him shudderingly, her eyes hidden, as though to exclude the vision. “She had drowned herself?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, poor thing—poor thing!”

They paused awhile, the minutes delving an abyss between them till he threw a few irrelevant words across the silence. “One of the gardeners found them.”

“Poor thing!”

“It was sufficiently horrible.”

“Horrible—oh!” She had swung round again to her pole. “Poor Denis! *You* were not there—*you* didn’t have to—?”

“I had to see her.” She felt the instant relief in his voice. He could talk now, could distend his nerves in the warm air of her sympathy. “I had to identify her.” He rose nervously and began to pace the room. “It’s knocked the wind out of me. I—my God! I couldn’t foresee it, could I?” He halted before her with outstretched hands of

argument. "I did all I could—it's not *my* fault, is it?"

"Your fault? Denis!"

"She wouldn't take the money—" He broke off, checked by her awakened glance.

"The money? What money?" Her face changed, hardening as his relaxed. "Had you offered her *money* to give up the case?"

He stared a moment, and then dismissed the implication with a laugh.

"No—no; after the case was decided against her. She seemed hard up, and I sent Hinton to her with a cheque."

"And she refused it?"

"Yes."

"What did she say?"

"Oh, I don't know—the usual thing. That she'd only wanted to prove she was his wife—on the child's account. That she'd never wanted his money. Hinton said she was very quiet—not in the least excited—but she sent back the cheque."

Kate sat motionless, her head bent, her hands clasped about her knees. She no longer looked at Peyton.

"Could there have been a mistake?" she asked slowly.

"A mistake?"

She raised her head now, and fixed her eyes on his, with a strange insistence of observation. "Could they have been married?"

"The courts didn't think so."

"Could the courts have been mistaken?"

He started up again, and threw himself into another chair. "Good God, Kate! We gave her every chance to prove her case—why didn't she do it? You don't know what you're talking about—such things are kept from girls. Why, whenever a man of Arthur's kind dies, such—such women turn up. There are lawyers who live on such jobs—ask your father about it. Of course, this woman expected to be bought off—"

"But if she wouldn't take your money?"

"She expected a big sum, I mean, to drop the case. When she found we meant to fight it, she saw the game was up. I suppose it was her last throw, and she was desperate; we don't know how many times she may have been through the same thing before. That kind of woman is always trying to make money out of the heirs of any man who—who has—been about with them."

Kate received this in silence. She had a sense of walking along a narrow ledge of consciousness above a sheer hallucinating depth into which she dared not look. But the depth drew her, and she plunged one terrified glance into it.

"But the child—the child was Arthur's?"

Peyton shrugged his shoulders. "There again—how can we tell? Why, I don't suppose the woman herself—I wish to heaven your father were here to explain!"

She rose and crossed over to him, laying her hands on his shoulders with a gesture almost maternal.

"Don't let us talk of it," she said. "You did all you could. Think what a comfort you were to poor Arthur."

He let her hands lie where she had placed them, without response or resistance.

"I tried—I tried hard to keep him straight!"

"We all know that—every one knows it. And we know how grateful he was—what a difference it made to him in the end. It would have been dreadful to think of his dying out there alone."

She drew him down on a sofa and seated herself by his side. A deep lassitude was upon him, and the hand she had possessed herself of lay in her hold inert.

"It was splendid of you to travel day and night as you did. And then that dreadful week before he died! But for you he would have died alone among strangers."

He sat silent, his head dropping forward, his eyes fixed. "Among strangers," he repeated absently.

She looked up, as if struck by a sudden thought. "That poor

woman—did you ever see her while you were out there?”

He drew his hand away and gathered his brows together as if in an effort of remembrance.

“I saw her—oh, yes, I saw her.” He pushed the tumbled hair from his forehead and stood up. “Let us go out,” he said. “My head is in a fog. I want to get away from it all.”

A wave of compunction drew her to her feet.

“It was my fault! I ought not to have asked so many questions.” She turned and rang the bell. “I’ll order the ponies—we shall have time for a drive before sunset.”

II

With the sunset in their faces they swept through the keen-scented autumn air at the swiftest pace of Kate’s ponies. She had given the reins to Peyton, and he had turned the horses’ heads away from the lake, rising by woody upland lanes to the high pastures which still held the sunlight. The horses were fresh enough to claim his undivided attention, and he drove in silence, his smooth fair profile turned to his companion, who sat silent also.

Kate Orme was engaged in one of those rapid mental excursions which were forever sweeping her from the straight path of the actual into uncharted regions of conjecture. Her survey of life had always been marked by the tendency to seek out ultimate relations, to extend her researches to the limit of her imaginative experience. But hitherto she had been like some young captive brought up in a windowless palace whose painted walls she takes for the actual world. Now the palace had been shaken to its base, and through a cleft in the walls she looked out upon life. For the first moment all was indistinguishable blackness; then she began to detect vague shapes and confused gestures in the depths. There were people below there, men like Denis, girls like herself—for under the unlikeness she felt the strange affinity—all struggling in that awful coil of moral darkness, with agonized hands reaching up for rescue. Her heart

shrank from the horror of it, and then, in a passion of pity, drew back to the edge of the abyss. Suddenly her eyes turned toward Denis. His face was grave, but less disturbed. And men knew about these things! They carried this abyss in their bosoms, and went about smiling, and sat at the feet of innocence. Could it be that Denis—Denis even— Ah, no! She remembered what he had been to poor Arthur; she understood, now, the vague allusions to what he had tried to do for his brother. He had seen Arthur down there, in that coiling blackness, and had leaned over and tried to drag him out. But Arthur was too deep down, and his arms were interlocked with other arms—they had dragged each other deeper, poor souls, like drowning people who fight together in the waves! Kate's visualizing habit gave a hateful precision and persistency to the image she had evoked—she could not rid herself of the vision of anguished shapes striving together in the darkness. The horror of it took her by the throat—she drew a choking breath, and felt the tears on her face.

Peyton turned to her. The horses were climbing a hill, and his attention had strayed from them.

"This has done me good," he began; but as he looked his voice changed. "Kate! What is it? Why are you crying? Oh, for God's sake, *don't!*" he ended, his hand closing on her wrist.

She steadied herself and raised her eyes to his.

"I—I couldn't help it," she stammered, struggling in the sudden release of her pent compassion. "It seems so awful that we should stand so close to this horror—that it might have been you who—"

"I who—what on earth do you mean?" he broke in stridently.

"Oh, don't you see? I found myself exulting that you and I were so far from it—above it—safe in ourselves and each other—and then the other feeling came—the sense of selfishness, of going by on the other side; and I tried to realize that it might have been you and I who—who were down there in the night and the flood—"

Peyton let the whip fall on the ponies' flanks. "Upon my soul," he said with a laugh, "you must have a nice opinion of both of us."

The words fell chillingly on the blaze of her self-immolation. Would she never learn to remember that Denis was incapable of mounting such hypothetical pyres? He might be as alive as herself to the direct demands of duty, but of its imaginative claims he was robustly unconscious. The thought brought a wholesome reaction of thankfulness.

“Ah, well,” she said, the sunset dilating through her tears, “don’t you see that I can bear to think such things only because they’re impossibilities? It’s easy to look over into the depths if one has a rampart to lean on. What I most pity poor Arthur for is that, instead of that woman lying there, so dreadfully dead, there might have been a girl like me, so exquisitely alive because of him; but it seems cruel, doesn’t it, to let what he was *not* add ever so little to the value of what you are? To let him contribute ever so little to my happiness by the difference there is between you?”

She was conscious, as she spoke, of straying again beyond his reach, through intricacies of sensation new even to her exploring susceptibilities. A happy literalness usually enabled him to strike a short cut through such labyrinths, and rejoin her smiling on the other side; but now she became wonderingly aware that he had been caught in the thick of her hypothesis.

“It’s the difference that makes you care for me, then?” he broke out, with a kind of violence which seemed to renew his clutch on her wrist.

“The difference?”

He lashed the ponies again, so sharply that a murmur escaped her, and he drew them up, quivering, with an inconsequent “Steady, boys,” at which their back-laid ears protested.

“It’s because I’m moral and respectable, and all that, that you’re fond of me,” he went on; “you’re—you’re simply in love with my virtues. You couldn’t imagine caring if I were down there in the ditch, as you say, with Arthur?”

The question fell on a silence which seemed to deepen suddenly

within herself. Every thought hung bated on the sense that something was coming: her whole consciousness became a void to receive it.

“Denis!” she cried.

He turned on her almost savagely. “I don’t want your pity, you know,” he burst out. “You can keep that for Arthur. I had an idea women loved men for themselves—through everything, I mean. But I wouldn’t steal your love—I don’t want it on false pretenses, you understand. Go and look into other men’s lives, that’s all I ask of you. I slipped into it—it was just a case of holding my tongue when I ought to have spoken—but I—I—for God’s sake, don’t sit there staring! I suppose you’ve seen all along that I knew he was married to the woman.”

III

The housekeeper’s reminding her that Mr. Orme would be at home the next day for dinner, and did she think he would like the venison with claret sauce or jelly, roused Kate to the first consciousness of her surroundings. Her father would return on the morrow: he would give to the dressing of the venison such minute consideration as, in his opinion, every detail affecting his comfort or convenience quite obviously merited. And if it were not the venison it would be something else; if it were not the housekeeper it would be Mr. Orme, charged with the results of a conference with his agent, a committee-meeting at his club, or any of the other incidents which, by happening to himself, became events. Kate found herself caught in the inexorable continuity of life, found herself gazing over a scene of ruin lit up by the punctual recurrence of habit as nature’s calm stare lights the morrow of a whirlwind.

Life was going on, then, and dragging her at its wheels. She could neither check its rush nor wrench loose from it and drop out—oh, how blessedly!—into darkness and cessation. She must go bounding on, racked, broken, but alive in every fibre. The most she could hope

was a few hours' respite, not from her own terrors, but from the pressure of outward claims: the midday halt, during which the victim is unbound while his torturers rest from their efforts. Till her father's return she would have the house to herself, and, the question of the venison despatched, could give herself to long lonely paces of the empty rooms, and shuddering subsidences upon her pillow.

Her first impulse, as the mist cleared from her brain, was the habitual one of reaching out for ultimate relations. She wanted to know the worst; and for her, as she saw in a flash, the worst of it was the core of fatality in what had happened. She shrank from her own way of putting it—nor was it even figuratively true that she had ever felt, under her faith in Denis, any such doubt as the perception implied. But that was merely because her imagination had never put him to the test. She was fond of exposing herself to hypothetical ordeals, but somehow she had never carried Denis with her on these adventures. What she saw now was that, in a world of strangeness, he remained the object least strange to her. She was not in the tragic case of the girl who suddenly sees her lover unmasked. No mask had dropped from Denis's face: the pink shades had simply been lifted from the lamps, and she saw him for the first time in an unmitigated glare.

Such exposure does not alter the features, but it lays an ugly emphasis on the most charming lines, pushing the smile to a grin, the curve of good-nature to the droop of slackness. And it was precisely into the flagging lines of extreme weakness that Denis's graceful contour flowed. In the terrible talk which had followed his avowal, and wherein every word flashed a light on his moral processes, she had been less startled by what he had done than by the way in which his conscience had already become a passive surface for the channelling of consequences. He was like a child who has put a match to the curtains, and stands agape at the blaze. It was horribly naughty to put the match—but beyond that the child's responsibility did not extend. In this business of Arthur's, where all had been

wrong from the beginning—where self-defence might well find a plea for its casuistries in the absence of a definite right to be measured by—it had been easy, after the first slip, to drop a little lower with each struggle. The woman—oh, the woman was—well, of the kind who prey on such men. Arthur, out there, at his lowest ebb, had drifted into living with her as a man drifts into drink or opium. He knew what she was—he knew where she had come from. But he had fallen ill, and she had nursed him—nursed him devotedly, of course. That was her chance, and she knew it. Before he was out of the fever she had the noose around him—he came to and found himself married. Such cases were common enough—if the man recovered he bought off the woman and got a divorce. It was all a part of the business—the marriage, the bribe, the divorce. Some of those women made a big income out of it—they were married and divorced once a year. If Arthur had only got well—but, instead, he had a relapse and died. And there was the woman, made his widow by mischance as it were, with her child on her arm—whose child?—and a scoundrelly black-mailing lawyer to work up her case for her. Her claim was clear enough—the right of dower, a third of his estate. But if he had never meant to marry her? If he had been trapped as patently as a rustic fleeced in a gambling-hell? Arthur, in his last hours, had confessed to the marriage, but had also acknowledged its folly. And after his death, when Denis came to look about him and make inquiries, he found that the witnesses, if there had been any, were dispersed and undiscoverable. The whole question hinged on Arthur's statement to his brother. Suppress that statement, and the claim vanished, and with it the scandal, the humiliation, the life-long burden of the woman and child dragging the name of Peyton through heaven knew what depths. He had thought of that first, Denis swore, rather than of the money. The money, of course, had made a difference,—he was too honest not to own it—but not till afterward, he declared—would have declared on his honour, but that the word tripped him up, and sent a flush to his forehead.

Thus, in broken phrases, he flung his defence at her: a defence improvised, pieced together as he went along, to mask the crude instinctiveness of his act. For with increasing clearness Kate saw, as she listened, that there had been no real struggle in his mind; that, but for the grim logic of chance, he might never have felt the need of any justification. If the woman, after the manner of such baffled huntresses, had wandered off in search of fresh prey, he might, quite sincerely, have congratulated himself on having saved a decent name and an honest fortune from her talons. It was the price she had paid to establish her claim that for the first time brought him to a startled sense of its justice. His conscience responded only to the concrete pressure of facts.

It was with the anguish of this discovery that Kate Orme locked herself in at the end of their talk. How the talk had ended, how at length she had got him from the room and the house, she recalled but confusedly. The tragedy of the woman's death, and of his own share in it, were as nothing in the disaster of his bright irreclaimableness. Once, when she had cried out, "You would have married me and said nothing," and he groaned back, "But I *have* told you," she felt like a trainer with a lash above some bewildered animal.

But she persisted savagely. "You told me because you had to; because your nerves gave way; because you knew it couldn't hurt you to tell." The perplexed appeal of his gaze had almost checked her. "You told me because it was a relief; but nothing will really relieve you—nothing will really help you—till you have told some one who—who *will* hurt you."

"Who will hurt me—?"

"Till you have told the truth as—as openly as you lied."

He started up, ghastly with fear. "I don't understand you."

"You must confess, then—publicly—openly—you must go to the judge. I don't know how it's done."

"To the judge? When they're both dead? When everything is at an

end? What good could that do?" he groaned.

"Everything is not at an end for you—everything is just beginning. You must clear yourself of this guilt; and there is only one way—to confess it. And you must give back the money."

This seemed to strike him as conclusive proof of her irrelevance. "I wish I had never heard of the money! But to whom would you have me give it back? I tell you she was a waif out of the gutter. I don't believe any one knew her real name—I don't believe she had one."

"She must have had a mother and father."

"Am I to devote my life to hunting for them through the slums of California? And how shall I know when I have found them? It's impossible to make you understand. I did wrong—I did horribly wrong—but that is not the way to repair it."

"What is, then?"

He paused, a little askance at the question. "To do better—to do my best," he said, with a sudden flourish of firmness. "To take warning by this dreadful—"

"Oh, be silent," she cried out, and hid her face. He looked at her hopelessly.

At last he said: "I don't know what good it can do to go on talking. I have only one more thing to say. Of course you know that you are free."

He spoke simply, with a sudden return to his old voice and accent, at which she weakened as under a caress. She lifted her head and gazed at him. "Am I?" she said musingly.

"Kate!" burst from him; but she raised a silencing hand.

"It seems to me," she said, "that I am imprisoned—imprisoned with you in this dreadful thing. First I must help you to get out—then it will be time enough to think of myself."

His face fell and he stammered: "I don't understand you."

"I can't say what I shall do—or how I shall feel—till I know what you are going to do and feel."

"You must see how I feel—that I'm half dead with it."

“Yes—but that is only half.”

He turned this over for a perceptible space of time before asking slowly: “You mean that you’ll give me up, if I don’t do this crazy thing you propose?”

She paused in turn. “No,” she said; “I don’t want to bribe you. You must feel the need of it yourself.”

“The need of proclaiming this thing publicly?”

“Yes.”

He sat staring before him. “Of course you realize what it would mean?” he began at length.

“To you?” she returned.

“I put that aside. To others—to you. I should go to prison.”

“I suppose so,” she said simply.

“You seem to take it very easily—I’m afraid my mother wouldn’t.”

“Your mother?” This produced the effect he had expected.

“You hadn’t thought of her, I suppose? It would probably kill her.”

“It would have killed her to think that you could do what you have done!”

“It would have made her very unhappy; but there’s a difference.”

Yes: there was a difference; a difference which no rhetoric could disguise. The secret sin would have made Mrs. Peyton wretched, but it would not have killed her. And she would have taken precisely Denis’s view of the elasticity of atonement: she would have accepted private regrets as the genteel equivalent of open expiation. Kate could even imagine her extracting a “lesson” from the providential fact that her son had not been found out.

“You see it’s not so simple,” he broke out, with a tinge of doleful triumph.

“No: it’s not simple,” she assented.

“One must think of others,” he continued, gathering faith in his argument as he saw her reduced to acquiescence.

She made no answer, and after a moment he rose to go. So far, in retrospect, she could follow the course of their talk; but when, in the

act of parting, argument lapsed into entreaty, and renunciation into the passionate appeal to give him at least one more hearing, her memory lost itself in a tumult of pain, and she recalled only that, when the door closed on him, he took with him her promise to see him once again.

IV

She had promised to see him again; but the promise did not imply that she had rejected his offer of freedom. In the first rush of misery she had not fully repossessed herself, had felt herself entangled in his fate by a hundred meshes of association and habit; but after a sleepless night spent with the thought of him—that dreadful bridal of their souls—she woke to a morrow in which he had no part. She had not sought her freedom, nor had he given it; but a chasm had opened at their feet, and they found themselves on different sides.

Now she was able to scan the disaster from the melancholy vantage of her independence. She could even draw a solace from the fact that she had ceased to love Denis. It was inconceivable that an emotion so interwoven with every fibre of consciousness should cease as suddenly as the flow of sap in an uprooted plant; but she had never allowed herself to be tricked by the current phraseology of sentiment, and there were no stock axioms to protect her from the truth.

It was probably because she had ceased to love him that she could look forward with a kind of ghastly composure to seeing him again. She had stipulated, of course, that the wedding should be put off, but she had named no other condition beyond asking for two days to herself—two days during which he was not even to write. She wished to shut herself in with her misery, to accustom herself to it as she had accustomed herself to happiness. But actual seclusion was impossible: the subtle reactions of life almost at once began to break down her defences. She could no more have her wretchedness to herself than any other emotion: all the lives about her were so many

unconscious factors in her sensations. She tried to concentrate herself on the thought as to how she could best help poor Denis; for love, in ebbing, had laid bare an unsuspected depth of pity. But she found it more and more difficult to consider his situation in the abstract light of right and wrong. Open expiation still seemed to her the only possible way of healing; but she tried vainly to think of Mrs. Peyton as taking such a view. Yet Mrs. Peyton ought at least to know what had happened: was it not, in the last resort, she who should pronounce on her son's course? For a moment Kate was fascinated by this evasion of responsibility; she had nearly decided to tell Denis that he must begin by confessing everything to his mother. But almost at once she began to shrink from the consequences. There was nothing she so dreaded for him as that any one should take a light view of his act: should turn its irremediableness into an excuse. And this, she foresaw, was what Mrs. Peyton would do. The first burst of misery over, she would envelop the whole situation in a mist of expediency. Brought to the bar of Kate's judgment, she at once revealed herself incapable of higher action.

Kate's conception of her was still under arraignment when the actual Mrs. Peyton fluttered in. It was the afternoon of the second day, as the girl phrased it in the dismal re-creation of her universe. She had been thinking so hard of Mrs. Peyton that the lady's silvery insubstantial presence seemed hardly more than a projection of the thought; but as Kate collected herself, and regained contact with the outer world, her preoccupation yielded to surprise. It was unusual for Mrs. Peyton to pay visits. For years she had remained enthroned in a semi-invalidism which prohibited effort while it did not preclude diversion; and the girl at once divined a special purpose in her coming.

Mrs. Peyton's traditions would not have permitted any direct method of attack; and Kate had to sit through the usual prelude of ejaculation and anecdote. Presently, however, the elder lady's voice gathered significance, and laying her hand on Kate's she murmured:

"I have come to talk to you of this sad affair."

Kate began to tremble. Was it possible that Denis had after all spoken? A rising hope checked her utterance, and she saw in a flash that it still lay with him to regain his hold on her. But Mrs. Peyton went on delicately: "It has been a great shock to my poor boy. To be brought in contact with Arthur's past was in itself inexpressibly painful; but this last dreadful business—that woman's wicked act—"

"Wicked?" Kate exclaimed.

Mrs. Peyton's gentle stare reproved her. "Surely religion teaches us that suicide is a sin? And to murder her child! I ought not to speak to you of such things, my dear. No one has ever mentioned anything so dreadful in my presence: my dear husband used to screen me so carefully from the painful side of life. Where there is so much that is beautiful to dwell upon, we should try to ignore the existence of such horrors. But nowadays everything is in the papers; and Denis told me he thought it better that you should hear the news first from him."

Kate nodded without speaking.

"He felt how *dreadful* it was to have to tell you. But I tell him he takes a morbid view of the case. Of course one is shocked at the woman's crime—but, if one looks a little deeper, how can one help seeing that it may have been designed as the means of rescuing that poor child from a life of vice and misery? That is the view I want Denis to take: I want him to see how all the difficulties of life disappear when one has learned to look for a divine purpose in human sufferings."

Mrs. Peyton rested a moment on this period, as an experienced climber pauses to be overtaken by a less agile companion; but presently she became aware that Kate was still far below her, and perhaps needed a stronger incentive to the ascent.

"My dear child," she said adroitly, "I said just now that I was sorry you had been obliged to hear of this sad affair; but after all it is only you who can avert its consequences."

Kate drew an eager breath. "Its consequences?" she faltered.

Mrs. Peyton's voice dropped solemnly. "Denis has told me everything," she said.

"Everything?"

"That you insist on putting off the marriage. Oh, my dear, I do implore you to reconsider that!"

Kate sank back with the sense of having passed again into a region of leaden shadow. "Is that all he told you?"

Mrs. Peyton gazed at her with arch raillery. "All? Isn't it everything—to him?"

"Did he give you my reason, I mean?"

"He said you felt that, after this shocking tragedy, there ought, in decency, to be a delay; and I quite understand the feeling. It does seem too unfortunate that the woman should have chosen this particular time! But you will find as you grow older that life is full of such sad contrasts."

Kate felt herself slowly petrifying under the warm drip of Mrs. Peyton's platitudes.

"It seems to me," the elder lady continued, "that there is only one point from which we ought to consider the question—and that is, its effect on Denis. But for that we ought to refuse to know anything about it. But it has made my boy so unhappy. The law-suit was a cruel ordeal to him—the dreadful notoriety, the revelation of poor Arthur's infirmities. Denis is as sensitive as a woman; it is his unusual refinement of feeling that makes him so worthy of being loved by you. But such sensitiveness may be carried to excess. He ought not to let this unhappy incident prey on him: it shows a lack of trust in the divine ordering of things. That is what troubles me: his faith in life has been shaken. And—you must forgive me, dear child—you *will* forgive me, I know—but I can't help blaming you a little—"

Mrs. Peyton's accent converted the accusation into a caress, which prolonged itself in a tremulous pressure of Kate's hand.

The girl gazed at her blankly. "You blame *me*——?"

"Don't be offended, my child. I only fear that your excessive

sympathy with Denis, your own delicacy of feeling, may have led you to encourage his morbid ideas. He tells me you were very much shocked—as you naturally would be—as any girl must be—I would not have you otherwise, dear Kate! It is *beautiful* that you should both feel so; most beautiful; but you know religion teaches us not to yield too much to our grief. Let the dead bury their dead; the living owe themselves to each other. And what had this wretched woman to do with either of you? It is a misfortune for Denis to have been connected in any way with a man of Arthur Peyton's character; but after all, poor Arthur did all he could to atone for the disgrace he brought on us, by making Denis his heir—and I am sure I have no wish to question the decrees of Providence." Mrs. Peyton paused again, and then softly absorbed both of Kate's hands. "For my part," she continued, "I see in it another instance of the beautiful ordering of events. Just after dear Denis's inheritance has removed the last obstacle to your marriage, this sad incident comes to show how desperately he needs you, how cruel it would be to ask him to defer his happiness."

She broke off, shaken out of her habitual placidity by the abrupt withdrawal of the girl's hands. Kate sat inertly staring, but no answer rose to her lips.

At length Mrs. Peyton resumed, gathering her draperies about her with a tentative hint of leave-taking: "I may go home and tell him that you will not put off the wedding?"

Kate was still silent, and her visitor looked at her with the mild surprise of an advocate unaccustomed to plead in vain.

"If your silence means refusal, my dear, I think you ought to realize the responsibility you assume." Mrs. Peyton's voice had acquired an edge of righteous asperity. "If Denis has a fault it is that he is too gentle, too yielding, too readily influenced by those he cares for. Your influence is paramount with him now—but if you turn from him just when he needs your help, who can say what the result will be?"

The argument, though impressively delivered, was hardly of a nature to carry conviction to its hearer; but it was perhaps for that very reason that she suddenly and unexpectedly replied to it by sinking back into her seat with a burst of tears. To Mrs. Peyton, however, tears were the signal of surrender, and, at Kate's side in an instant, she hastened to temper her triumph with magnanimity.

"Don't think I don't feel with you; but we must both forget ourselves for our boy's sake. I told him I should come back with your promise."

The arm she had slipped about Kate's shoulder fell back with the girl's start. Kate had seen in a flash what capital would be made of her emotion.

"No, no, you misunderstand me. I can make no promise," she declared.

The older lady sat a moment irresolute; then she restored her arm to the shoulder from which it had been so abruptly displaced.

"My dear child," she said, in a tone of tender confidence, "if I have misunderstood you, ought you not to enlighten me? You asked me just now if Denis had given me your reason for this strange postponement. He gave me one reason, but it seems hardly sufficient to explain your conduct. If there is any other,—and I know you well enough to feel sure there is,—will you not trust me with it? If my boy has been unhappy enough to displease you, will you not give his mother the chance to plead his cause? Remember, no one should be condemned unheard. As Denis's mother, I have the right to ask for your reason."

"My reason? My reason?" Kate stammered, panting with the exhaustion of the struggle. Oh, if only Mrs. Peyton would release her! "If you have the right to know it, why doesn't he tell you?" she cried.

Mrs. Peyton stood up, quivering. "I will go home and ask him," she said. "I will tell him he has your permission to speak."

She moved toward the door, with the nervous haste of a person unaccustomed to decisive action. But Kate sprang before her.

"No, no; don't ask him! I implore you not to ask him," she cried.

Mrs. Peyton turned on her with sudden authority of voice and gesture. "Do I understand you?" she said. "You admit that you have a reason for putting off your marriage, and yet you forbid me—me, Denis's mother—to ask him what it is? My poor child, I needn't ask, for I know already. If he has offended you, and you refuse him the chance to defend himself, I needn't look farther for your reason: it is simply that you have ceased to love him."

Kate fell back from the door which she had instinctively barricaded.

"Perhaps that is it," she murmured, letting Mrs. Peyton pass.

V

Mr. Orme's returning carriage-wheels crossed Mrs. Peyton's indignant flight; and an hour later Kate, in the bland candlelight of the dinner-hour, sat listening with practised fortitude to her father's comments on the venison.

She had wondered, as she awaited him in the drawing-room, if he would notice any change in her appearance. It seemed to her that the flagellation of her thoughts must have left visible traces. But Mr. Orme was not a man of subtle perceptions, save where his personal comfort was affected: though his egoism was clothed in the finest feelers, he did not suspect a similar surface in others. His daughter, as part of himself, came within the normal range of his solicitude; but she was an outlying region, a subject province; and Mr. Orme's was a highly centralized polity.

News of the painful incident—he often used Mrs. Peyton's vocabulary—had reached him at his club, and to some extent disturbed the assimilation of a carefully ordered breakfast; but since then two days had passed, and it did not take Mr. Orme forty-eight hours to resign himself to the misfortunes of others. It was all very nasty, of course, and he wished to heaven it hadn't happened to any one about to be connected with him; but he viewed it with the

transient annoyance of a gentleman who has been splashed by the mud of a fatal runaway.

Mr. Orme affected, under such circumstances, a bluff and hearty stoicism as remote as possible from Mrs. Peyton's deprecating evasion of facts. It was a bad business; he was sorry Kate should have been mixed up with it; but she would be married soon now, and then she would see that life wasn't exactly a Sunday-school story. Everybody was exposed to such disagreeable accidents: he remembered a case in their own family—oh, a distant cousin whom Kate wouldn't have heard of—a poor fellow who had got entangled with just such a woman, and having (most properly) been sent packing by his father, had justified the latter's course by promptly forging his name—a very nasty affair altogether; but luckily the scandal had been hushed up, the woman bought off, and the prodigal, after a season of probation, safely married to a nice girl with a good income, who was told by the family that the doctors recommended his settling in California.

Luckily the scandal was hushed up: the phrase blazed out against the dark background of Kate's misery. That was doubtless what most people felt—the words represented the consensus of respectable opinion. The best way of repairing a fault was to hide it: to tear up the floor and bury the victim at night. Above all, no coroner and no autopsy!

She began to feel a strange interest in her distant cousin. "And his wife—did she know what he had done?"

Mr. Orme stared. His moral pointed, he had returned to the contemplation of his own affairs.

"His wife? Oh, of course not. The secret has been most admirably kept; but her property was put in trust, so she's quite safe with him."

Her property! Kate wondered if her faith in her husband had also been put in trust, if her sensibilities had been protected from his possible inroads.

"Do you think it quite fair to have deceived her in that way?" Mr.

Orme gave her a puzzled glance: he had no taste for the by-paths of ethical conjecture.

“His people wanted to give the poor fellow another chance: they did the best they could for him.”

“And—he has done nothing dishonourable since?”

“Not that I know of: the last I heard was that they had a little boy, and that he was quite happy. At that distance he’s not likely to bother *us*, at all events.”

Long after Mr. Orme had left the topic, Kate remained lost in its contemplation. She had begun to perceive that the fair surface of life was honeycombed by a vast system of moral sewage. Every respectable household had its special arrangements for the private disposal of family scandals; it was only among the reckless and improvident that such hygienic precautions were neglected. Who was she to pass judgment on the merits of such a system? The social health must be preserved: the means devised were the result of long experience and the collective instinct of self-preservation. She had meant to tell her father that evening that her marriage had been put off; but she now abstained from doing so, not from any doubt of Mr. Orme’s acquiescence—he could always be made to feel the force of conventional scruples—but because the whole question sank into insignificance beside the larger issue which his words had raised.

In her own room, that night, she passed through that travail of the soul of which the deeper life is born. Her first sense was of a great moral loneliness—an isolation more complete, more impenetrable, than that in which the discovery of Denis’s act had plunged her. For she had vaguely leaned, then, on a collective sense of justice that should respond to her own ideas of right and wrong: she still believed in the logical correspondence of theory and practice. Now she saw that, among those nearest her, there was no one who recognized the moral need of expiation. She saw that to take her father or Mrs. Peyton into her confidence would be but to widen the circle of sterile misery in which she and Denis moved. At first the

aspect of life thus revealed to her seemed simply mean and base—a world where honour was a pact of silence between adroit accomplices. The network of circumstance had tightened round her, and every effort to escape drew its meshes closer. But as her struggles subsided she felt the spiritual release which comes with acceptance: not connivance in dishonour, but recognition of evil. Out of that dark vision light was to come, the shaft of cloud turning to the pillar of fire. For here, at last, life lay before her as it was: not brave, garlanded and victorious, but naked, grovelling and diseased, dragging its maimed limbs through the mud, yet lifting piteous hands to the stars. Love itself, once throned aloft on an altar of dreams, how it stole to her now, storm-beaten and scarred, pleading for the shelter of her breast! Love, indeed, not in the old sense in which she had conceived it, but a graver, austerer presence—the charity of the mystic three. She thought she had ceased to love Denis—but what had she loved in him but her happiness and his? Their affection had been the *garden enclosed* of the Canticles, where they were to walk forever in a delicate isolation of bliss. But now love appeared to her as something more than this—something wider, deeper, more enduring than the selfish passion of a man and a woman. She saw it in all its far-reaching issues, till the first meeting of two pairs of young eyes kindled a light which might be a high-lifted beacon across dark waters of humanity.

All this did not come to her clearly, consecutively, but in a series of blurred and shifting images. Marriage had meant to her, as it means to girls brought up in ignorance of life, simply the exquisite prolongation of wooing. If she had looked beyond, to the vision of wider ties, it was as a traveller gazes over a land veiled in golden haze, and so far distant that the imagination delays to explore it. But now through the blur of sensations one image strangely persisted—the image of Denis's child. Had she ever before thought of their having a child? She could not remember. She was like one who awakens from a long fever: she recalled nothing of her former self or

of her former feelings. She knew only that the vision persisted—the vision of the child whose mother she was not to be. It was impossible that she should marry Denis—her inmost soul rejected him . . . but it was just because she was not to be the child's mother that its image followed her so pleadingly. For she saw with perfect clearness the inevitable course of events. Denis would marry some one else—he was one of the men who are fated to marry, and she needed not his mother's reminder that her abandonment of him at an emotional crisis would fling him upon the first sympathy within reach. He would marry a girl who knew nothing of his secret—for Kate was intensely aware that he would never again willingly confess himself—he would marry a girl who trusted him and leaned on him, as she, Kate Orme—the earlier Kate Orme—had done but two days since! And with this deception between them their child would be born: born to an inheritance of secret weakness, a vice of the moral fibre, as it might be born with some hidden physical taint which would destroy it before the cause could be detected. . . . Well, and what of it? Was she to hold herself responsible? Were not thousands of children born with some such unsuspected taint? . . . Ah, but if here was one that she could save? What if she, who had had so exquisite a vision of wifehood, should reconstruct from its ruins this vision of protecting maternity—if her love for her lover should be, not lost, but transformed, enlarged, into this passion of charity for his race? If she might expiate and redeem his fault by becoming a refuge from its consequences? Before this strange extension of her love all the old limitations seemed to fall. Something had cleft the surface of self, and there welled up the mysterious primal influences, the sacrificial instinct of her sex, a passion of spiritual motherhood that made her long to fling herself between the unborn child and its fate. . . .

She never knew, then or after, how she reached this mystic climax of effacement; she was only conscious, through her anguish, of that lift of the heart which made one of the saints declare that joy was the inmost core of sorrow. For it was indeed a kind of joy she felt, if old

names must serve for such new meanings; a surge of liberating faith in life, the old *credo quia absurdum* which is the secret cry of all supreme endeavour.

PART II

I

“Does it look nice, mother?”

Dick Peyton met her with the question on the threshold, drawing her gaily into the little square room, and adding, with a laugh with a blush in it: “You know she’s an uncommonly noticing person, and little things tell with her.”

He swung round on his heel to follow his mother’s smiling inspection of the apartment.

“She seems to have *all* the qualities,” Mrs. Denis Peyton remarked, as her circuit finally brought her to the prettily appointed tea-table.

“*All*,” he declared, taking the sting from her emphasis by his prompt adoption of it. Dick had always had a wholesome way of thus appropriating to his own use such small shafts of maternal irony as were now and then aimed at him.

Kate Peyton laughed and loosened her furs. “It looks charmingly,” she pronounced, ending her survey by an approach to the window, which gave, far below, the oblique perspective of a long side-street leading to Fifth Avenue.

The high-perched room was Dick Peyton’s private office, a retreat partitioned off from the larger enclosure in which, under a north light and on a range of deal tables, three or four young draughtsmen were busily engaged in elaborating his architectural projects. The outer door of the office bore the sign: *Peyton and Gill, Architects*; but Gill was an utilitarian person, as unobtrusive as his name, who contented himself with a desk in the work-room, and left Dick to lord it alone in the small apartment to which clients were introduced, and where the social part of the business was carried on.

It was to serve, on this occasion, as the scene of a tea designed, as Kate Peyton was vividly aware, to introduce a certain young lady to the scene of her son's labours. Mrs. Peyton had been hearing a great deal lately about Clemence Verney. Dick was naturally expansive, and his close intimacy with his mother—an intimacy fostered by his father's early death—if it had suffered some natural impairment in his school and college days, had of late been revived by four years of comradeship in Paris, where Mrs. Peyton, in a tiny apartment of the Rue de Varennes, had kept house for him during his course of studies at the Beaux Arts. There were indeed not lacking critics of her own sex who accused Kate Peyton of having figured too largely in her son's life; of having failed to efface herself at a period when it is agreed that young men are best left free to try conclusions with the world. Mrs. Peyton, had she cared to defend herself, might have said that Dick, if communicative, was not impressionable, and that the closeness of texture which enabled him to throw off her sarcasms preserved him also from the infiltration of her prejudices. He was certainly no knight of the apron-string, but a seemingly resolute and self-sufficient young man, whose romantic friendship with his mother had merely served to throw a veil of suavity over the hard angles of youth.

But Mrs. Peyton's real excuse was after all one which she would never have given. It was because her intimacy with her son was the one need of her life that she had, with infinite tact and discretion, but with equal persistency, clung to every step of his growth, dissembling herself, adapting herself, rejuvenating herself, in the passionate effort to be always within reach, but never in the way.

Denis Peyton had died after seven years of marriage, when his boy was barely six. During those seven years he had managed to squander the best part of the fortune he had inherited from his step-brother; so that, at his death, his widow and son were left with a scant competence. Mrs. Peyton, during her husband's life, had apparently made no effort to restrain his expenditure. She had even

been accused, by those judicious persons who are always ready with an estimate of their neighbours' motives, of having encouraged poor Denis's improvidence for the gratification of her own ambition. She had in fact, in the early days of their marriage, tried to launch him in politics, and had perhaps drawn somewhat heavily on his funds in the first heat of the contest; but the experiment ending in failure, as Denis Peyton's experiments were apt to end, she had made no farther demands on his exchequer. Her personal tastes were in fact unusually simple, but her outspoken indifference to money was not, in the opinion of her critics, designed to act as a check upon her husband; and it resulted in leaving her, at his death, in straits from which it was impossible not to deduce a moral.

Her small means, and the care of the boy's education, served the widow as a pretext for secluding herself in a socially remote suburb, where it was inferred that she was expiating, on queer food and in ready-made boots, her rash defiance of fortune. Whether or not Mrs. Peyton's penance took this form, she hoarded her substance to such good purpose that she was not only able to give Dick the best of schooling, but to propose, on his leaving Harvard, that he should prolong his studies by another four years at the Beaux Arts. It had been the joy of her life that her boy had early shown a marked bent for a special line of work. She could not have borne to see him reduced to a mere money-getter, yet she was not sorry that their small means forbade the cultivation of an ornamental leisure. In his college days Dick had troubled her by a superabundance of tastes, a restless flitting from one form of artistic expression to another. Whatever art he enjoyed he wished to practise, and he passed from music to painting, from painting to architecture, with an ease which seemed to his mother to indicate lack of purpose rather than excess of talent. She had observed that these changes were usually due, not to self-criticism, but to some external discouragement. Any depreciation of his work was enough to convince him of the uselessness of pursuing that special form of art, and the reaction

produced the immediate conviction that he was really destined to shine in some other line of work. He had thus swung from one calling to another till, at the end of his college career, his mother took the decisive step of transplanting him to the Beaux Arts, in the hope that a definite course of study, combined with the stimulus of competition, might fix his wavering aptitudes. The result justified her expectation, and their four years in the Rue de Varennes yielded the happiest confirmation of her belief in him. Dick's ability was recognized not only by his mother, but by his professors. He was engrossed in his work, and his first successes developed his capacity for application. His mother's only fear was that praise was still too necessary to him. She was uncertain how long his ambition would sustain him in the face of failure. He gave lavishly where he was sure of a return; but it remained to be seen if he were capable of production without recognition. She had brought him up in a wholesome scorn of material rewards, and nature seemed, in this direction, to have seconded her training. He was genuinely indifferent to money, and his enjoyment of beauty was of that happy sort which does not generate the wish for possession. As long as the inner eye had food for contemplation, he cared very little for the deficiencies in his surroundings; or, it might rather be said, he felt, in the sum-total of beauty about him, an ownership of appreciation that left him free from the fret of personal desire. Mrs. Peyton had cultivated to excess this disregard of material conditions; but she now began to ask herself whether, in so doing, she had not laid too great a strain on a temperament naturally exalted. In guarding against other tendencies she had perhaps fostered in him too exclusively those qualities which circumstances had brought to an unusual development in herself. His enthusiasms and his disdains were alike too unqualified for that happy mean of character which is the best defence against the surprises of fortune. If she had taught him to set an exaggerated value on ideal rewards, was not that but a shifting of the danger-point on which her fears had always hung? She

trembled sometimes to think how little love and a lifelong vigilance had availed in the deflecting of inherited tendencies.

Her fears were in a measure confirmed by the first two years of their life in New York, and the opening of his career as a professional architect. Close on the easy triumphs of his studentship there came the chilling reaction of public indifference. Dick, on his return from Paris, had formed a partnership with an architect who had had several years of practical training in a New York office; but the quiet and industrious Gill, though he attracted to the new firm a few small jobs which overflowed from the business of his former employer, was not able to infect the public with his own faith in Peyton's talents, and it was trying to a genius who felt himself capable of creating palaces to have to restrict his efforts to the building of suburban cottages or the planning of cheap alterations in private houses.

Mrs. Peyton expended all the ingenuities of tenderness in keeping up her son's courage; and she was seconded in the task by a friend whose acquaintance Dick had made at the Beaux Arts, and who, two years before the Peytons, had returned to New York to start on his own career as an architect. Paul Darrow was a young man full of crude seriousness, who, after a youth of struggling work and study in his native northwestern state, had won a scholarship which sent him abroad for a course at the Beaux Arts. His two years there coincided with the first part of Dick's residence, and Darrow's gifts had at once attracted the younger student. Dick was unstinted in his admiration of rival talent, and Mrs. Peyton, who was romantically given to the cultivation of such generousities, had seconded his enthusiasm by the kindest offers of hospitality to the young student. Darrow thus became the grateful frequenter of their little *salon*; and after their return to New York the intimacy between the young men was renewed, though Mrs. Peyton found it more difficult to coax Dick's friend to her New York drawing-room than to the informal surroundings of the Rue de Varennes. There, no doubt, secluded and absorbed in her son's work, she had seemed to Darrow almost a

fellow-student; but seen among her own associates she became once more the woman of fashion, divided from him by the whole breadth of her ease and his awkwardness. Mrs. Peyton, whose tact had divined the cause of his estrangement, would not for an instant let it affect the friendship of the two young men. She encouraged Dick to frequent Darrow, in whom she divined a persistency of effort, an artistic self-confidence, in curious contrast to his social hesitations. The example of his obstinate capacity for work was just the influence her son needed, and if Darrow would not come to them she insisted that Dick must seek him out, must never let him think that any social discrepancy could affect a friendship based on deeper things. Dick, who had all the loyalties, and who took an honest pride in his friend's growing success, needed no urging to maintain the intimacy; and his copious reports of midnight colloquies in Darrow's lodgings showed Mrs. Peyton that she had a strong ally in her invisible friend.

It had been, therefore, somewhat of a shock to learn in the course of time that Darrow's influence was being shared, if not counteracted, by that of a young lady in whose honour Dick was now giving his first professional tea. Mrs. Peyton had heard a great deal about Miss Clemence Verney, first from the usual purveyors of such information, and more recently from her son, who, probably divining that rumour had been before him, adopted his usual method of disarming his mother by taking her into his confidence. But, ample as her information was, it remained perplexing and contradictory, and even her own few meetings with the girl had not helped her to a definite opinion. Miss Verney, in conduct and ideas, was patently of the "new school": a young woman of feverish activities and broadcast judgments, whose very versatility made her hard to define. Mrs. Peyton was shrewd enough to allow for the accidents of environment; what she wished to get at was the residuum of character beneath Miss Verney's shifting surface.

"It looks charmingly," Mrs. Peyton repeated, giving a loosening touch to the chrysanthemums in a tall vase on her son's desk.

Dick laughed, and glanced at his watch.

"They won't be here for another quarter of an hour. I think I'll tell Gill to clean out the work-room before they come."

"Are we to see the drawings for the competition?" his mother asked.

He shook his head smilingly. "Can't—I've asked one or two of the Beaux Arts fellows, you know; and besides, old Darrow's actually coming."

"Impossible!" Mrs. Peyton exclaimed.

"He swore he would last night." Dick laughed again, with a tinge of self-satisfaction. "I've an idea he wants to see Miss Verney."

"Ah," his mother murmured. There was a pause before she added: "Has Darrow really gone in for this competition?"

"Rather! I should say so! He's simply working himself to the bone."

Mrs. Peyton sat revolving her muff on a meditative hand; at length she said: "I'm not sure I think it quite nice of him." Her son halted before her with an incredulous stare.

"*Mother!*" he exclaimed.

The rebuke sent a blush to her forehead. "Well—considering your friendship—and everything."

"Everything? What do you mean by everything? The fact that he has more ability than I have and is therefore more likely to succeed? The fact that he needs the money and the success a deuced sight more than any of us? Is that the reason you think he oughtn't to have entered? Mother! I never heard you say an ungenerous thing before."

The blush deepened to crimson, and she rose with a nervous laugh. "It *was* ungenerous," she conceded. "I suppose I'm jealous for you. I hate these competitions!"

Her son smiled reassuringly. "You needn't. I'm not afraid: I think I shall pull it off this time. In fact, Paul's the only man I'm afraid of—I'm always afraid of Paul—but the mere fact that he's in the thing is a tremendous stimulus."

His mother continued to study him with an anxious tenderness.

"Have you worked out the whole scheme? Do you *see* it yet?"

"Oh, broadly, yes. There's a gap here and there—a hazy bit, rather—it's the hardest problem I've ever had to tackle; but then it's my biggest opportunity, and I've simply *got* to pull it off!"

Mrs. Peyton sat silent, considering his flushed face and illumined eye, which were rather those of the victor nearing the goal than of the runner just beginning the race. She remembered something that Darrow had once said of him: "Dick always sees the end too soon."

"You haven't too much time left," she murmured.

"Just a week. But I shan't go anywhere after this. I shall renounce the world." He glanced smilingly at the festal tea-table and the embowered desk. "When I next appear, it will either be with my heel on Paul's neck—poor old Paul—or else—or else—being dragged lifeless from the arena!"

His mother nervously took up the laugh with which he ended. "Oh, not lifeless," she said.

His face clouded. "Well, maimed for life, then," he muttered.

Mrs. Peyton made no answer. She knew how much hung on the possibility of his winning the competition which for weeks past had engrossed him. It was a design for the new museum of sculpture, for which the city had recently voted half a million. Dick's taste ran naturally to the grandiose, and the erection of public buildings had always been the object of his ambition. Here was an unmatched opportunity, and he knew that, in a competition of the kind, the newest man had as much chance of success as the firm of most established reputation, since every competitor entered on his own merits, the designs being submitted to a jury of architects who voted on them without knowing the names of the contestants. Dick, characteristically, was not afraid of the older firms; indeed, as he had told his mother, Paul Darrow was the only rival he feared. Mrs. Peyton knew that, to a certain point, self-confidence was a good sign; but somehow her son's did not strike her as being of the right substance—it seemed to have no dimension but extent. Her fears

were complicated by a suspicion that, under his professional eagerness for success, lay the knowledge that Miss Verney's favour hung on the victory. It was that, perhaps, which gave a feverish touch to his ambition; and Mrs. Peyton, surveying the future from the height of her maternal apprehensions, divined that the situation depended mainly on the girl's view of it. She would have given a great deal to know Clemence Verney's conception of success.

II

Miss Verney, when she presently appeared, in the wake of the impersonal and exclamatory young married woman who served as a background to her vivid outline, seemed competent to impart at short notice any information required of her. She had never struck Mrs. Peyton as more alert and efficient. A melting grace of line and colour tempered her edges with the charming haze of youth; but it occurred to her critic that she might emerge from this morning mist as a dry and metallic old woman.

If Miss Verney suspected a personal application in Dick's hospitality, it did not call forth in her the usual tokens of self-consciousness. Her manner may have been a shade more vivid than usual, but she preserved all her bright composure of glance and speech, so that one guessed, under the rapid dispersal of words, an undisturbed steadiness of perception. She was lavishly but not indiscriminately interested in the evidences of her host's industry, and as the other guests assembled, straying with vague ejaculations through the labyrinth of scale drawings and blue prints, Mrs. Peyton noted that Miss Verney alone knew what these symbols stood for.

To his visitors' requests to be shown his plans for the competition, Peyton had opposed a laughing refusal, enforced by the presence of two fellow-architects, young men with lingering traces of the Beaux Arts in their costume and vocabulary, who stood about in Gavarni attitudes and dazzled the ladies by allusions to fenestration and entasis. The party had already drifted back to the tea-table when a

hesitating knock announced Darrow's approach. He entered with his usual air of having blundered in by mistake, embarrassed by his hat and great-coat, and thrown into deeper confusion by the necessity of being introduced to the ladies grouped about the urn. To the men he threw a gruff nod of fellowship, and Dick having relieved him of his encumbrances, he retreated behind the shelter of Mrs. Peyton's welcome. The latter judiciously gave him time to recover, and when she turned to him he was engaged in a surreptitious inspection of Miss Verney, whose dusky slenderness, relieved against the bare walls of the office, made her look like a young St. John of Donatello's. The girl returned his look with one of her clear glances, and the group having presently broken up again, Mrs. Peyton saw that she had drifted to Darrow's side. The visitors at length wandered back to the work-room to see a portfolio of Dick's watercolours; but Mrs. Peyton remained seated behind the urn, listening to the interchange of talk through the open door while she tried to coördinate her impressions.

She saw that Miss Verney was sincerely interested in Dick's work: it was the nature of her interest that remained in doubt. As if to solve this doubt, the girl presently reappeared alone on the threshold, and discovering Mrs. Peyton, advanced toward her with a smile.

"Are you tired of hearing us praise Mr. Peyton's things?" she asked, dropping into a low chair beside her hostess. "Unintelligent admiration must be a bore to people who know, and Mr. Darrow tells me you are almost as learned as your son."

Mrs. Peyton returned the smile, but evaded the question. "I should be sorry to think your admiration unintelligent," she said. "I like to feel that my boy's work is appreciated by people who understand it."

"Oh, I have the usual smattering," said Miss Verney carelessly. "I *think* I know why I admire his work; but then I am sure I see more in it when some one like Mr. Darrow tells me how remarkable it is."

"Does Mr. Darrow say that?" the mother exclaimed, losing sight of her object in the rush of maternal pleasure.

"He has said nothing else: it seems to be the only subject which loosens his tongue. I believe he is more anxious to have your son win the competition than to win it himself."

"He is a very good friend," Mrs. Peyton assented. She was struck by the way in which the girl led the topic back to the special application of it which interested her. She had none of the artifices of prudery.

"He feels sure that Mr. Peyton *will* win," Miss Verney continued. "It was very interesting to hear his reasons. He is an extraordinarily interesting man. It must be a tremendous incentive to have such a friend."

Mrs. Peyton hesitated. "The friendship is delightful; but I don't know that my son needs the incentive. He is almost too ambitious."

Miss Verney looked up brightly. "Can one be?" she said. "Ambition is so splendid! It must be so glorious to be a man and go crashing through obstacles, straight up to the thing one is after. I'm afraid I don't care for people who are superior to success. I like marriage by capture!" She rose with her wandering laugh, and stood flushed and sparkling above Mrs. Peyton, who continued to gaze at her gravely.

"What do you call success?" the latter asked. "It means so many different things."

"Oh, yes, I know—the inward approval, and all that. Well, I'm afraid I like the other kind: the drums and wreaths and acclamations. If I were Mr. Peyton, for instance, I'd much rather win the competition than—than be as disinterested as Mr. Darrow."

Mrs. Peyton smiled. "I hope you won't tell him so," she said half seriously. "He is over-stimulated already; and he is so easily influenced by any one who—whose opinion he values."

She stopped abruptly, hearing herself, with a strange inward shock, reëcho the words which another man's mother had once spoken to her. Miss Verney did not seem to take the allusion to herself, for she continued to fix on Mrs. Peyton a gaze of impartial sympathy.

“But we can’t help being interested!” she declared.

“It’s very kind of you; but I wish you would all help him to feel that this competition is after all of very little account compared with other things—his health and his peace of mind, for instance. He is looking horribly used up.”

The girl glanced over her shoulder at Dick, who was just reëntering the room at Darrow’s side.

“Oh, do you think so?” she said. “I should have thought it was his friend who was used up.”

Mrs. Peyton followed the glance with surprise. She had been too preoccupied to notice Darrow, whose crudely modelled face was always of a dull pallour, to which his slow-moving grey eye lent no relief except in rare moments of expansion. Now the face had the fallen lines of a death-mask, in which only the smile he turned on Dick remained alive; and the sight smote her with compunction. Poor Darrow! He did look horribly fagged out: as if he needed care and petting and good food. No one knew exactly how he lived. His rooms, according to Dick’s report, were fireless and ill kept, but he stuck to them because his landlady, whom he had fished out of some financial plight, had difficulty in obtaining other lodgers. He belonged to no club, and wandered out alone for his meals, mysteriously refusing the hospitality which his friends pressed on him. It was plain that he was very poor, and Dick conjectured that he sent what he earned to an aunt in his native village; but he was so silent about such matters that, outside of his profession, he seemed to have no personal life.

Miss Verney’s companion having presently advised her of the lapse of time, there ensued a general leave-taking, at the close of which Dick accompanied the ladies to their carriage. Darrow was meanwhile blundering into his great-coat, a process which always threw him into a state of perspiring embarrassment; but Mrs. Peyton, surprising him in the act, suggested that he should defer it and give her a few moments’ talk.

"Let me make you some fresh tea," she said, as Darrow blushingly shed the garment, "and when Dick comes back we'll all walk home together. I've not had a chance to say two words to you this winter."

Darrow sank into a chair at her side and nervously contemplated his boots. "I've been tremendously hard at work," he said.

"I know: *too* hard at work, I'm afraid. Dick tells me you have been wearing yourself out over your competition plans."

"Oh, well, I shall have time to rest now," he returned. "I put the last stroke to them this morning."

Mrs. Peyton gave him a quick look. "You're ahead of Dick, then."

"In point of time only," he said smiling.

"That is in itself an advantage," she answered with a tinge of asperity. In spite of an honest effort for impartiality she could not, at the moment, help regarding Darrow as an obstacle in her son's path.

"I wish the competition were over!" she exclaimed, conscious that her voice had betrayed her. "I hate to see you both looking so fagged."

Darrow smiled again, perhaps at her studied inclusion of himself.

"Oh, *Dick's* all right," he said. "He'll pull himself together in no time."

He spoke with an emphasis which might have struck her, if her sympathies had not again been deflected by the allusion to her son.

"Not if he doesn't win," she exclaimed.

Darrow took the tea she had poured for him, knocking the spoon to the floor in his eagerness to perform the feat gracefully. In bending to recover the spoon he struck the tea-table with his shoulder, and set the cups dancing. Having regained a measure of composure, he took a swallow of the hot tea and set it down with a gasp, precariously near the edge of the tea-table. Mrs. Peyton rescued the cup, and Darrow, apparently forgetting its existence, rose and began to pace the room. It was always hard for him to sit still when he talked.

"You mean he's so tremendously set on it?" he broke out.

Mrs. Peyton hesitated. "You know him almost as well as I do," she said. "He's capable of anything where there is a possibility of success; but I'm always afraid of the reaction."

"Oh, well, Dick's a man," said Darrow bluntly. "Besides, he's going to succeed."

"I wish he didn't feel so sure of it. You mustn't think I'm afraid for him. He's a man, and I want him to take his chances with other men; but I wish he didn't care so much about what people think."

"People?"

"Miss Verney, then: I suppose you know."

Darrow paused in front of her. "Yes: he's talked a good deal about her. You think she wants him to succeed?"

"At any price!"

He drew his brows together. "What do you call any price?"

"Well—herself, in this case, I believe."

Darrow bent a puzzled stare on her. "You mean she attaches that amount of importance to this competition?"

"She seems to regard it as symbolical: that's what I gather. And I'm afraid she's given him the same impression."

Darrow's sunken face was suffused by his rare smile. "Oh, well, he'll pull it off then!" he said.

Mrs. Peyton rose with a distracted sigh. "I half hope he won't, for such a motive," she exclaimed.

"The motive won't show in his work," said Darrow. He added, after a pause probably devoted to the search for the right word: "He seems to think a great deal of her."

Mrs. Peyton fixed him thoughtfully. "I wish I knew what *you* think of her."

"Why, I never saw her before."

"No; but you talked with her to-day. You've formed an opinion: I think you came here on purpose."

He chuckled joyously at her discernment: she had always seemed to him gifted with supernatural insight. "Well, I did want to see her,"

he owned.

“And what do you think?”

He took a few vague steps and then halted before Mrs. Peyton. “I think,” he said, smiling, “that she likes to be helped first, and to have everything on her plate at once.”

III

At dinner, with a rush of contrition, Mrs. Peyton remembered that she had after all not spoken to Darrow about his health. He had distracted her by beginning to talk of Dick; and besides, much as Darrow’s opinions interested her, his personality had never fixed her attention. He always seemed to her simply a vehicle for the transmission of ideas.

It was Dick who recalled her to a sense of her omission by asking if she hadn’t thought that old Paul looked rather more ragged than usual.

“He did look tired,” Mrs. Peyton conceded. “I meant to tell him to take care of himself.”

Dick laughed at the futility of the measure. “Old Paul is never tired: he can work twenty-five hours out of the twenty-four. The trouble with him is that he’s ill. Something wrong with the machinery, I’m afraid.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. Has he seen a doctor?”

“He wouldn’t listen to me when I suggested it the other day; but he’s so deuced mysterious that I don’t know what he may have done since.” Dick rose, putting down his coffee-cup and half-smoked cigarette. “I’ve half a mind to pop in on him tonight and see how he’s getting on.”

“But he lives at the other end of the earth; and you’re tired yourself.”

“I’m not tired; only a little strung-up,” he returned, smiling. “And besides, I’m going to meet Gill at the office by and by and put in a night’s work. It won’t hurt me to take a look at Paul first.”

Mrs. Peyton was silent. She knew it was useless to contend with her son about his work, and she tried to fortify herself with the remembrance of her own words to Darrow: Dick was a man and must take his chance with other men.

But Dick, glancing at his watch, uttered an exclamation of annoyance. "Oh, by Jove, I shan't have time after all. Gill is waiting for me now; we must have dawdled over dinner." He bent to give his mother a caressing tap on the cheek. "Now don't worry," he adjured her; and as she smiled back at him he added with a sudden happy blush: "She doesn't, you know: she's so sure of me."

Mrs. Peyton's smile faded, and laying a detaining hand on his, she said with sudden directness: "Sure of you, or of your success?"

He hesitated. "Oh, she regards them as synonymous. She thinks I'm bound to get on."

"But if you don't?"

He shrugged laughingly, but with a slight contraction of his confident brows. "Why, I shall have to make way for some one else, I suppose. That's the law of life."

Mrs. Peyton sat upright, gazing at him with a kind of solemnity. "Is it the law of love?" she asked.

He looked down on her with a smile that trembled a little. "My dear romantic mother, I don't want her pity, you know!"

Dick, coming home the next morning shortly before daylight, left the house again after a hurried breakfast, and Mrs. Peyton heard nothing of him till nightfall. He had promised to be back for dinner, but a few moments before eight, as she was coming down to the drawing-room, the parlour-maid handed her a hastily pencilled note.

"Don't wait for me," it ran. "Darrow is ill and I can't leave him. I'll send a line when the doctor has seen him."

Mrs. Peyton, who was a woman of rapid reactions, read the words with a pang. She was ashamed of the jealous thoughts she had harboured of Darrow, and of the selfishness which had made her lose

sight of his troubles in the consideration of Dick's welfare. Even Clemence Verney, whom she secretly accused of a want of heart, had been struck by Darrow's ill looks, while she had had eyes only for her son. Poor Darrow! How cold and self-engrossed he must have thought her! In the first rush of penitence her impulse was to drive at once to his lodgings; but the infection of his own shyness restrained her. Dick's note gave no details: the illness was evidently grave, but might not Darrow regard her coming as an intrusion? To repair her negligence of yesterday by a sudden invasion of his privacy might be only a greater failure in tact; and after a moment of deliberation she resolved on sending to ask Dick if he wished her to go to him.

The reply, which came late, was what she had expected. "No; we have all the help we need. The doctor has sent a good nurse, and is coming again later. It's pneumonia, but of course he doesn't say much yet. Let me have some beef-juice as soon as the cook can make it."

The beef-juice ordered and dispatched, she was left to a vigil in melancholy contrast to that of the previous evening. Then she had been enclosed in the narrow limits of her maternal interests; now the barriers of self were broken down, and her personal preoccupations swept away on the current of a wider sympathy. As she sat there in the radius of lamp-light which, for so many evenings, had held Dick and herself in a charmed circle of tenderness, she saw that her love for her boy had come to be merely a kind of extended egotism. Love had narrowed instead of widening her, had rebuilt between herself and life the very walls which, years and years before, she had laid low with bleeding fingers. It was horrible, how she had come to sacrifice everything to the one passion of ambition for her boy. . . .

At daylight she sent another messenger, one of her own servants, who returned without having seen Dick. Mr. Peyton had sent word that there was no change. He would write later; he wanted nothing. The day wore on drearily. Once Kate found herself computing the precious hours lost to Dick's unfinished task. She blushed at her

ineradicable selfishness, and tried to turn her mind to poor Darrow. But she could not master her impulses; and now she caught herself indulging the thought that his illness would at least exclude him from the competition. But no—she remembered that he had said his work was finished. Come what might, he stood in the path of her boy's success. She hated herself for the thought, but it would not down.

Evening drew on, but there was no note from Dick. At length, in the shamed reaction from her fears, she rang for a carriage and went upstairs to dress. She could stand aloof no longer: she must go to Darrow, if only to escape from her wicked thoughts of him. As she came down again she heard Dick's key in the door. She hastened her steps, and as she reached the hall he stood before her without speaking.

She looked at him and the question died on her lips. He nodded, and walked slowly past her.

"There was no hope from the first," he said.

The next day Dick was taken up with the preparations for the funeral. The distant aunt, who appeared to be Darrow's only relation, had been duly notified of his death; but no answer having been received from her, it was left to his friend to fulfil the customary duties. He was again absent for the best part of the day; and when he returned at dusk Mrs. Peyton, looking up from the tea-table behind which she awaited him, was startled by the deep-lined misery of his face.

Her own thoughts were too painful for ready expression, and they sat for a while in a mute community of wretchedness.

"Is everything arranged?" she asked at length.

"Yes. Everything."

"And you have not heard from the aunt?"

He shook his head.

"Can you find no trace of any other relations?"

"None. I went over all his papers. There were very few, and I found no address but the aunt's." He sat thrown back in his chair, disregarding the cup of tea she had mechanically poured for him. "I found this, though," he added after a pause, drawing a letter from his pocket and holding it out to her.

She took it doubtfully. "Ought I to read it?"

"Yes."

She saw then that the envelope, in Darrow's hand, was addressed to her son. Within were a few pencilled words, dated on the first day of his illness, the morrow of the day on which she had last seen him.

"Dear Dick," she read, "I want you to use my plans for the museum if you can get any good out of them. Even if I pull out of this I want you to. I shall have other chances, and I have an idea this one means a lot to you."

Mrs. Peyton sat speechless, gazing at the date of the letter, which she had instantly connected with her last talk with Darrow. She saw that he had understood her, and the thought scorched her to the soul.

"Wasn't it glorious of him?" Dick said.

She dropped the letter, and hid her face in her hands.

IV

The funeral took place the next morning, and on the return from the cemetery Dick told his mother that he must go and look over things at Darrow's office. He had heard the day before from his friend's aunt, a helpless person to whom telegraphy was difficult and travel inconceivable, and who, in eight pages of unpunctuated eloquence, made over to Dick what she called the melancholy privilege of winding up her nephew's affairs.

Mrs. Peyton looked anxiously at her son. "Is there no one who can do this for you? He must have had a clerk or some one who knows about his work."

Dick shook his head. "Not lately. He hasn't had much to do this

winter, and these last months he had chucked everything to work alone over his plans.”

The word brought a faint colour to Mrs. Peyton’s cheek. It was the first allusion that either of them had made to Darrow’s bequest.

“Oh, of course you must do all you can,” she murmured, turning alone into the house.

The emotions of the morning had stirred her deeply, and she sat at home during the day, letting her mind dwell, in a kind of retrospective piety, on the thought of poor Darrow’s devotion. She had given him too little time while he lived, had acquiesced too easily in his growing habits of seclusion; and she felt it as a proof of insensibility that she had not been more closely drawn to the one person who had loved Dick as she loved him. The evidence of that love, as shown in Darrow’s letter, filled her with a vain compunction. The very extravagance of his offer lent it a deeper pathos. It was wonderful that, even in the urgency of affection, a man of his almost morbid rectitude should have overlooked the restrictions of professional honour, should have implied the possibility of his friend’s overlooking them. It seemed to make his sacrifice the more complete that it had, unconsciously, taken the form of a subtle temptation.

The last word arrested Mrs. Peyton’s thoughts. A temptation? To whom? Not, surely, to one capable, as her son was capable, of rising to the height of his friend’s devotion. The offer, to Dick, would mean simply, as it meant to her, the last touching expression of an inarticulate fidelity: the utterance of a love which at last had found its formula. Mrs. Peyton dismissed as morbid any other view of the case. She was annoyed with herself for supposing that Dick could be ever so remotely affected by the possibility at which poor Darrow’s renunciation hinted. The nature of the offer removed it from practical issues to the idealizing region of sentiment.

Mrs. Peyton had been sitting alone with these thoughts for the greater part of the afternoon, and dusk was falling when Dick

entered the drawing-room. In the dim light, with his pallour heightened by the sombre effect of his mourning, he came upon her almost startingly, with a revival of some long-effaced impression which, for a moment, gave her the sense of struggling among shadows. She did not, at first, know what had produced the effect; then she saw that it was his likeness to his father.

"Well—is it over?" she asked, as he threw himself into a chair without speaking.

"Yes: I've looked through everything." He leaned back, crossing his hands behind his head, and gazing past her with a look of utter lassitude.

She paused a moment, and then said tentatively: "Tomorrow you will be able to go back to your work."

"Oh—my work," he exclaimed, as if to brush aside an ill-timed pleasantry.

"Are you too tired?"

"No." He rose and began to wander up and down the room. "I'm not tired.—Give me some tea, will you?" He paused before her while she poured the cup, and then, without taking it, turned away to light a cigarette.

"Surely there is still time?" she suggested, with her eyes on him.

"Time? To finish my plans? Oh, yes—there's time. But they're not worth it."

"Not worth it?" She started up, and then dropped back into her seat, ashamed of having betrayed her anxiety. "They are worth as much as they were last week," she said with an attempt at cheerfulness.

"Not to me," he returned. "I hadn't seen Darrow's then."

There was a long silence. Mrs. Peyton sat with her eyes fixed on her clasped hands, and her son paced the room restlessly.

"Are they so wonderful?" she asked at length.

"Yes."

She paused again, and then said, lifting a tremulous glance to his

face: "That makes his offer all the more beautiful."

Dick was lighting another cigarette, and his face was turned from her. "Yes—I suppose so," he said in a low tone.

"They were quite finished, he told me," she continued, unconsciously dropping her voice to the pitch of his.

"Yes."

"Then they will be entered, I suppose?"

"Of course—why not?" he answered almost sharply.

"Shall you have time to attend to all that and to finish yours too?"

"Oh, I suppose so. I've told you it isn't a question of time. I see now that mine are not worth bothering with."

She rose and approached him, laying her hands on his shoulders. "You are tired and unstrung; how can you judge? Why not let me look at both designs to-morrow?"

Under her gaze he flushed abruptly and drew back with a half-impatient gesture.

"Oh, I'm afraid that wouldn't help me; you'd be sure to think mine best," he said with a laugh.

"But if I could give you good reasons?" she pressed him.

He took her hand, as if ashamed of his impatience. "Dear mother, if you had any reasons their mere existence would prove that they were bad."

His mother did not return his smile. "You won't let me see the two designs then?" she said with a faint tinge of insistence.

"Oh, of course—if you want to—if you only won't talk about it now! Can't you see that I'm pretty nearly deadbeat?" he burst out uncontrollably; and as she stood silent, he added with a weary fall in his voice, "I think I'll go upstairs and see if I can't get a nap before dinner."

Though they had separated upon the assurance that she should see the two designs if she wished it, Mrs. Peyton knew they would not be shown to her. Dick, indeed, would not again deny her request; but

had he not reckoned on the improbability of her renewing it? All night she lay confronted by that question. The situation shaped itself before her with that hallucinating distinctness which belongs to the midnight vision. She knew now why Dick had suddenly reminded her of his father: had she not once before seen the same thought moving behind the same eyes? She was sure it had occurred to Dick to use Darrow's drawings. As she lay awake in the darkness she could hear him, long after midnight, pacing the floor overhead: she held her breath, listening to the recurring beat of his foot, which seemed that of an imprisoned spirit revolving wearily in the cage of the same thought. She felt in every fibre that a crisis in her son's life had been reached, that the act now before him would have a determining effect on his whole future. The circumstances of her past had raised to clairvoyance her natural insight into human motive, had made of her a moral barometer responding to the faintest fluctuations of atmosphere, and years of anxious meditation had familiarized her with the form which her son's temptations were likely to take. The peculiar misery of her situation was that she could not, except indirectly, put this intuition, this foresight, at his service. It was a part of her discernment to be aware that life is the only real counsellor, that wisdom unfiltered through personal experience does not become a part of the moral tissues. Love such as hers had a great office, the office of preparation and direction; but it must know how to hold its hand and keep its counsel, how to attend upon its object as an invisible influence rather than as an active interference.

All this Kate Peyton had told herself again and again, during those hours of anxious calculation in which she had tried to cast Dick's horoscope; but not in her moments of most fantastic foreboding had she figured so cruel a test of her courage. If her prayers for him had taken precise shape, she might have asked that he should be spared the spectacular, the dramatic appeal to his will-power: that his temptations should slip by him in a dull disguise. She had secured him against all ordinary forms of baseness; the vulnerable point lay

higher, in that region of idealizing egotism which is the seat of life in such natures.

Years of solitary foresight gave her mind a singular alertness in dealing with such possibilities. She saw at once that the peril of the situation lay in the minimum of risk it involved. Darrow had employed no assistant in working out his plans for the competition, and his secluded life made it almost certain that he had not shown them to any one, and that she and Dick alone knew them to have been completed. Moreover, it was a part of Dick's duty to examine the contents of his friend's office, and in doing this nothing would be easier than to possess himself of the drawings and make use of any part of them that might serve his purpose. He had Darrow's authority for doing so; and though the act involved a slight breach of professional probity, might not his friend's wishes be invoked as a secret justification? Mrs. Peyton found herself almost hating poor Darrow for having been the unconscious instrument of her son's temptation. But what right had she, after all, to suspect Dick of considering, even for a moment, the act of which she was so ready to accuse him? His unwillingness to let her see the drawings might have been the accidental result of lassitude and discouragement. He was tired and troubled, and she had chosen the wrong moment to make the request. His want of readiness might even be due to the wish to conceal from her how far his friend had surpassed him. She knew his sensitiveness on this point, and reproached herself for not having foreseen it. But her own arguments failed to convince her. Deep beneath her love for her boy and her faith in him there lurked a nameless doubt. She could hardly now, in looking back, define the impulse upon which she had married Denis Peyton: she knew only that the depths of her nature had been loosened, and that she had been borne forward on their current to the very fate from which her heart recoiled. But if in one sense her marriage remained a problem, there was another in which her motherhood seemed to solve it. She had never lost the sense of having snatched her child from some dim

peril which still lurked and hovered; and he became more closely hers with every effort of her vigilant love. For the act of rescue had not been accomplished once and for all in the moment of immolation: it had not been by a sudden stroke of heroism, but by ever-renewed and indefatigable effort, that she had built up for him the miraculous shelter of her love. And now that it stood there, a hallowed refuge against failure, she could not even set a light in the pane, but must let him grope his way to it unaided.

V

Mrs. Peyton's midnight musings summed themselves up in the conclusion that the next few hours would end her uncertainty. She felt the day to be decisive. If Dick offered to show her the drawings, her fears would be proved groundless; if he avoided the subject, they were justified.

She dressed early in order not to miss him at breakfast; but as she entered the dining-room the parlour-maid told her that Mr. Peyton had overslept himself, and had rung to have his breakfast sent upstairs. Was it a pretext to avoid her? She was vexed at her own readiness to see a portent in the simplest incident; but while she blushed at her doubts she let them govern her. She left the dining-room door open, determined not to miss him if he came downstairs while she was at breakfast; then she went back to the drawing-room and sat down at her writing-table, trying to busy herself with some accounts while she listened for his step. Here too she had left the door open; but presently even this slight departure from her daily usage seemed a deviation from the passive attitude she had adopted, and she rose and shut the door. She knew that she could still hear his step on the stairs—he had his father's quick swinging gait—but as she sat listening, and vainly trying to write, the closed door seemed to symbolize a refusal to share in his trial, a hardening of herself against his need of her. What if he should come down intending to speak, and should be turned from his purpose? Slighter obstacles

have deflected the course of events in those indeterminate moments when the soul floats between two tides. She sprang up quickly, and as her hand touched the latch she heard his step on the stairs.

When he entered the drawing-room she had regained the writing-table and could lift a composed face to his. He came in hurriedly, yet with a kind of reluctance beneath his haste: again it was his father's step. She smiled, but looked away from him as he approached her; she seemed to be re-living her own past as one re-lives things in the distortion of fever.

"Are you off already?" she asked, glancing at the hat in his hand.

"Yes; I'm late as it is. I overslept myself." He paused and looked vaguely about the room. "Don't expect me till late—don't wait dinner for me."

She stirred impulsively. "Dick, you're overworking—you'll make yourself ill."

"Nonsense. I'm as fit as ever this morning. Don't be imagining things."

He dropped his habitual kiss on her forehead, and turned to go. On the threshold he paused, and she felt that something in him sought her and then drew back. "Good-bye," he called to her as the door closed on him.

She sat down and tried to survey the situation divested of her midnight fears. He had not referred to her wish to see the drawings: but what did the omission signify? Might he not have forgotten her request? Was she not forcing the most trivial details to fit in with her apprehensions? Unfortunately for her own reassurance, she knew that her familiarity with Dick's processes was based on such minute observation, and that, to such intimacy as theirs, no indications were trivial. She was as certain as if he had spoken, that when he had left the house that morning he was weighing the possibility of using Darrow's drawings, of supplementing his own incomplete design from the fulness of his friend's invention. And with a bitter pang she divined that he was sorry he had shown her Darrow's letter.

It was impossible to remain face to face with such conjectures, and though she had given up all her engagements during the few days since Darrow's death, she now took refuge in the thought of a concert which was to take place at a friend's house that morning. The music-room, when she entered, was thronged with acquaintances, and she found transient relief in that dispersal of attention which makes society an anæsthetic for some forms of wretchedness. Contact with the pressure of busy indifferent life often gives remoteness to questions which have clung as close as the flesh to the bone; and if Mrs. Peyton did not find such complete release, she at least interposed between herself and her anxiety the obligation to dissemble it. But the relief was only momentary, and when the first bars of the overture turned from her the smiles of recognition among which she had tried to lose herself, she felt a deeper sense of isolation. The music, which at another time would have swept her away on some rich current of emotion, now seemed to island her in her own thoughts, to create an artificial solitude in which she found herself more immitigably face to face with her fears. The silence, the *recueillement*, about her gave resonance to the inner voices, lucidity to the inner vision, till she seemed enclosed in a luminous empty horizon against which every possibility took the sharp edge of accomplished fact. With relentless precision the course of events was unrolled before her: she saw Dick yielding to his opportunity, snatching victory from dishonour, winning love, happiness and success in the act by which he lost himself. It was all so simple, so easy, so inevitable, that she felt the futility of struggling or hoping against it. He would win the competition, would marry Miss Verney, would press on to achievement through the opening which the first success had made for him.

As Mrs. Peyton reached this point in her forecast, she found her outward gaze arrested by the face of the young lady who so dominated her inner vision. Miss Verney, a few rows distant, sat intent upon the music, in that attitude of poised motion which was

her nearest approach to repose. Her slender brown profile with its breezy hair, her quick eye, and the lips which seemed to listen as well as speak, all betokened to Mrs. Peyton a nature through which the obvious energies blew free, a bare open stretch of consciousness without shelter for tenderer growths. She shivered to think of Dick's frail scruples exposed to those rustling airs. And then, suddenly, a new thought struck her. What if she might turn this force to her own use, make it serve, unconsciously to Dick, as the means of his deliverance? Hitherto she had assumed that her son's worst danger lay in the chance of his confiding his difficulty to Clemence Verney; and she had, in her own past, a precedent which made her think such a confidence not unlikely. If he did carry his scruples to the girl, she argued, the latter's imperviousness, her frank inability to understand them, would have the effect of dispelling them like mist; and he was acute enough to know this and profit by it. So she had hitherto reasoned; but now the girl's presence seemed to clarify her perceptions, and she told herself that something in Dick's nature, something which she herself had put there, would resist this short cut to safety, would make him take the more tortuous way to his goal rather than gain it through the privacies of the heart he loved. For she had lifted him thus far above his father, that it would be a disenchantment to him to find that Clemence Verney did not share his scruples. On this much, his mother now exultingly felt, she could count in her passive struggle for supremacy. No, he would never, never tell Clemence Verney—and his one hope, his sure salvation, therefore lay in some one else's telling her.

The excitement of this discovery had nearly, in mid-concert, swept Mrs. Peyton from her seat to the girl's side. Fearing to miss the latter in the throng at the entrance, she slipped out during the last number and, lingering in the farther drawing-room, let the dispersing audience drift her in Miss Verney's direction. The girl shone sympathetically on her approach, and in a moment they had detached themselves from the crowd and taken refuge in the

perfumed emptiness of the conservatory.

The girl, whose sensations were always easily set in motion, had at first a good deal to say of the music, for which she claimed, on her hearer's part, an active show of approval or dissent; but this dismissed, she turned a melting face on Mrs. Peyton and said with one of her rapid modulations of tone: "I was so sorry about poor Mr. Darrow."

Mrs. Peyton uttered an assenting sigh. "It was a great grief to us—a great loss to my son."

"Yes—I know. I can imagine what you must have felt. And then it was so unlucky that it should have happened just now."

Mrs. Peyton shot a reconnoitering glance at her profile. "His dying, you mean, on the eve of success?"

Miss Verney turned a frank smile upon her. "One ought to feel that, of course—but I'm afraid I am very selfish where my friends are concerned, and I was thinking of Mr. Peyton's having to give up his work at such a critical moment." She spoke without a note of deprecation: there was a pagan freshness in her opportunism.

Mrs. Peyton was silent, and the girl continued after a pause: "I suppose now it will be almost impossible for him to finish his drawings in time. It's a pity he hadn't worked out the whole scheme a little sooner. Then the details would have come of themselves."

Mrs. Peyton felt a contempt strangely mingled with exultation. If only the girl would talk in that way to Dick!

"He has hardly had time to think of himself lately," she said, trying to keep the coldness out of her voice.

"No, of course not," Miss Verney assented; "but isn't that all the more reason for his friends to think of him? It was very dear of him to give up everything to nurse Mr. Darrow—but, after all, if a man is going to get on in his career there are times when he must think first of himself."

Mrs. Peyton paused, trying to choose her words with deliberation. It was quite clear now that Dick had not spoken, and she felt the

responsibility that devolved upon her.

“Getting on in a career—is that always the first thing to be considered?” she asked, letting her eyes rest musingly on the girl’s.

The glance did not disconcert Miss Verney, who returned it with one of equal comprehensiveness. “Yes,” she said quickly, and with a slight blush. “With a temperament like Mr. Peyton’s I believe it is. Some people can pick themselves up after any number of bad falls: I am not sure that he could. I think discouragement would weaken instead of strengthening him.”

Both women had forgotten external conditions in the quick reach for each other’s meanings. Mrs. Peyton flushed, her maternal pride in revolt; but the answer was checked on her lips by the sense of the girl’s unexpected insight. Here was some one who knew Dick as well as she did—should she say a partisan or an accomplice? A dim jealousy stirred beneath Mrs. Peyton’s other emotions: she was undergoing the agony which the mother feels at the first intrusion on her privilege of judging her child; and her voice had a flutter of resentment.

“You must have a poor opinion of his character,” she said.

Miss Verney did not remove her eyes, but her blush deepened beautifully. “I have, at any rate,” she said, “a high one of his talent. I don’t suppose many men have an equal amount of moral and intellectual energy.”

“And you would cultivate the one at the expense of the other?”

“In certain cases—and up to a certain point.” She shook out the long fur of her muff, one of those silvery flexible furs which clothe a woman with a delicate sumptuousness. Everything about her, at the moment, seemed rich and cold—everything, as Mrs. Peyton quickly noted, but the blush lingering under her dark skin; and so complete was the girl’s self-command that the blush seemed to be there only because it had been forgotten.

“I dare say you think me strange,” she continued. “Most people do, because I speak the truth. It’s the easiest way of concealing one’s

feelings. I can, for instance, talk quite openly about Mr. Peyton under shelter of your inference that I shouldn't do so if I were what is called 'interested' in him. And as I *am* interested in him, my method has its advantages!" She ended with one of the fluttering laughs which seemed to flit from point to point of her expressive person.

Mrs. Peyton leaned toward her. "I believe you are interested," she said quietly; "and since I suppose you allow others the privilege you claim for yourself, I am going to confess that I followed you here in the hope of finding out the nature of your interest."

Miss Verney shot a glance at her, and drew away in a soft subsidence of undulating furs.

"Is this an embassy?" she asked smiling.

"No: not in any sense."

The girl leaned back with an air of relief. "I'm glad; I should have disliked—" She looked again at Mrs. Peyton. "You want to know what I mean to do?"

"Yes."

"Then I can only answer that I mean to wait and see what he does."

"You mean that everything is contingent on his success?"

"I am—if I'm everything," she admitted gaily.

The mother's heart was beating in her throat, and her words seemed to force themselves out through the throbs.

"I—I don't quite see why you attach such importance to this special success."

"Because he does," the girl returned instantly. "Because to him it is the final answer to his self-questioning—the questioning whether he is ever to amount to anything or not. He says if he has anything in him it ought to come out now. All the conditions are favourable—it is the chance he has always prayed for. You see," she continued, almost confidentially, but without the least loss of composure—"you see he has told me a great deal about himself and his various experiments—his phases of indecision and disgust. There are lots of

tentative talents in the world, and the sooner they are crushed out by circumstances the better. But it seems as though he really had it in him to do something distinguished—as though the uncertainty lay in his character and not in his talent. That is what interests, what attracts me. One can't teach a man to have genius, but if he has it one may show him how to use it. That is what I should be good for, you see—to keep him up to his opportunities."

Mrs. Peyton had listened with an intensity of attention that left her reply unprepared. There was something startling and yet half attractive in the girl's avowal of principles which are oftener lived by than professed.

"And you think," she began at length, "that in this case he has fallen below his opportunity?"

"No one can tell, of course; but his discouragement, his *abattement*, is a bad sign. I don't think he has any hope of succeeding."

The mother again wavered a moment. "Since you are so frank," she then said, "will you let me be equally so, and ask how lately you have seen him?"

The girl smiled at the circumlocution. "Yesterday afternoon," she said simply.

"And you thought him—"

"Horribly down on his luck. He said himself that his brain was empty."

Again Mrs. Peyton felt the throb in her throat, and a slow blush rose to her cheek. "Was that all he said?"

"About himself—was there anything else?" said the girl quickly.

"He didn't tell you of—of an opportunity to make up for the time he has lost?"

"An opportunity? I don't understand."

"He didn't speak to you, then, of Mr. Darrow's letter?"

"He said nothing of any letter."

"There *was* one, which was found after poor Darrow's death. In it he gave Dick leave to use his design for the competition. Dick says

the design is wonderful—it would give him just what he needs.”

Miss Verney sat listening raptly, with a rush of colour that suffused her like light.

“But when was this? Where was the letter found? He never said a word of it!” she exclaimed.

“The letter was found on the day of Darrow’s death.”

“But I don’t understand! Why has he never told me? Why should he seem so hopeless?” She turned an ignorant appealing face on Mrs. Peyton. It was prodigious, but it was true— she felt nothing, saw nothing, but the crude fact of the opportunity.

Mrs. Peyton’s voice trembled with the completeness of her triumph. “I suppose his reason for not speaking is that he has scruples.”

“Scruples?”

“He feels that to use the design would be dishonest.”

Miss Verney’s eyes fixed themselves on her in a commiserating stare. “Dishonest? When the poor man wished it himself? When it was his last request? When the letter is there to prove it? Why, the design belongs to your son! No one else has any right to it.”

“But Dick’s right does not extend to passing it off as his own—at least that is his feeling, I believe. If he won the competition he would be winning it on false pretenses.”

“Why should you call them false pretenses? His design might have been better than Darrow’s if he had had time to carry it out. It seems to me that Mr. Darrow must have felt this—must have felt that he owed his friend some compensation for the time he took from him. I can imagine nothing more natural than his wishing to make this return for your son’s sacrifice.”

She positively glowed with the force of her conviction, and Mrs. Peyton, for a strange instant, felt her own resistance wavering. She herself had never considered the question in that light—the light of Darrow’s viewing his gift as a justifiable compensation. But the glimpse she caught of it drove her shuddering behind her

retrenchments.

"That argument," she said coldly, "would naturally be more convincing to Darrow than to my son."

Miss Verney glanced up, struck by the change in Mrs. Peyton's voice.

"Ah, then you agree with him? You think it *would* be dishonest?"

Mrs. Peyton saw that she had slipped into self-betrayal. "My son and I have not spoken of the matter," she said evasively. She caught the flash of relief in Miss Verney's face.

"You haven't spoken? Then how do you know how he feels about it?"

"I only judge from—well, perhaps from his not speaking."

The girl drew a deep breath. "I see," she murmured. "That is the very reason that prevents his speaking."

"The reason?"

"Your knowing what he thinks—and his knowing that you know."

Mrs. Peyton was startled at her subtlety. "I assure you," she said, rising, "that I have done nothing to influence him."

The girl gazed at her musingly. "No," she said with a faint smile, "nothing except to read his thoughts."

VI

Mrs. Peyton reached home in the state of exhaustion which follows on a physical struggle. It seemed to her as though her talk with Clemence Verney had been an actual combat, a measuring of wrist and eye. For a moment she was frightened at what she had done—she felt as though she had betrayed her son to the enemy. But before long she regained her moral balance, and saw that she had merely shifted the conflict to the ground on which it could best be fought out—since the prize fought for was the natural battlefield. The reaction brought with it a sense of helplessness, a realization that she had let the issue pass out of her hold; but since, in the last analysis, it had never lain there, since it was above all needful that the

determining touch should be given by any hand but hers, she presently found courage to subside into inaction. She had done all she could—even more, perhaps, than prudence warranted—and now she could but await passively the working of the forces she had set in motion.

For two days after her talk with Miss Verney she saw little of Dick. He went early to his office and came back late. He seemed less tired, more self-possessed, than during the first days after Darrow's death; but there was a new inscrutableness in his manner, a note of reserve, of resistance almost, as though he had barricaded himself against her conjectures. She had been struck by Miss Verney's reply to the anxious asseveration that she had done nothing to influence Dick—"Nothing," the girl had answered, "except to read his thoughts." Mrs. Peyton shrank from this detection of a tacit interference with her son's liberty of action. She longed—how passionately he would never know—to stand apart from him in this struggle between his two destinies, and it was almost a relief that he on his side should hold aloof, should, for the first time in their relation, seem to feel her tenderness as an intrusion.

Only four days remained before the date fixed for the sending in of the designs, and still Dick had not referred to his work. Of Darrow, also, he had made no mention. His mother longed to know if he had spoken to Clemence Verney—or rather if the girl had forced his confidence. Mrs. Peyton was almost certain that Miss Verney would not remain silent—there were times when Dick's renewed application to his work seemed an earnest of her having spoken, and spoken convincingly. At the thought Kate's heart grew chill. What if her experiment should succeed in a sense she had not intended? If the girl should reconcile Dick to his weakness, should pluck the sting from his temptation? In this round of uncertainties the mother revolved for two interminable days; but the second evening brought an answer to her question.

Dick, returning earlier than usual from the office, had found, on

the hall-table, a note which, since morning, had been under his mother's observation. The envelope, fashionable in tint and texture, was addressed in a rapid staccato hand which seemed the very imprint of Miss Verney's utterance. Mrs. Peyton did not know the girl's writing; but such notes had of late lain often enough on the hall-table to make their attribution easy. This communication Dick, as his mother poured his tea, looked over with a face of shifting lights; then he folded it into his note-case, and said, with a glance at his watch: "If you haven't asked any one for this evening I think I'll dine out."

"Do, dear; the change will be good for you," his mother assented.

He made no answer, but sat leaning back, his hands clasped behind his head, his eyes fixed on the fire. Every line of his body expressed a profound physical lassitude, but the face remained alert and guarded. Mrs. Peyton, in silence, was busying herself with the details of the tea-making, when suddenly, inexplicably, a question forced itself to her lips.

"And your work—?" she said, strangely hearing herself speak.

"My work—?" He sat up, on the defensive almost, but without a tremor of the guarded face.

"You're getting on well? You've made up for lost time?"

"Oh, yes; things are going better." He rose, with another glance at his watch. "Time to dress," he said, nodding to her as he turned to the door.

It was an hour later, during her own solitary dinner, that a ring at the door was followed by the parlour-maid's announcement that Mr. Gill was there from the office. In the hall, in fact, Kate found her son's partner, who explained apologetically that he had understood Peyton was dining at home, and had come to consult him about a difficulty which had arisen since he had left the office. On hearing that Dick was out, and that his mother did not know where he had gone, Mr. Gill's perplexity became so manifest that Mrs. Peyton, after a moment, said hesitatingly: "He may be at a friend's house; I could

give you the address.”

The architect caught up his hat. “Thank you; I’ll have a try for him.”

Mrs. Peyton hesitated again. “Perhaps,” she suggested, “it would be better to telephone.”

She led the way into the little study behind the drawing-room, where a telephone stood on the writing-table. The folding doors between the two rooms were open: should she close them as she passed back into the drawing-room? On the threshold she wavered an instant; then she walked on and took her usual seat by the fire.

Gill, meanwhile, at the telephone, had “rung up” the Verney house, and inquired if his partner were dining there. The reply was evidently affirmative; and a moment later Kate knew that he was in communication with her son. She sat motionless, her hands clasped on the arms of her chair, her head erect, in an attitude of avowed attention. If she listened she would listen openly: there should be no suspicion of eavesdropping. Gill, engrossed in his message, was probably hardly conscious of her presence; but if he turned his head he should at least have no difficulty in seeing her, and in being aware that she could hear what he said. Gill, however, as she was quick to remember, was doubtless ignorant of any need for secrecy in his communication to Dick. He had often heard the affairs of the office discussed openly before Mrs. Peyton, had been led to regard her as familiar with all the details of her son’s work. He talked on unconcernedly, and she listened.

Ten minutes later, when he rose to go, she knew all that she had wanted to find out. Long familiarity with the technicalities of her son’s profession made it easy for her to translate the stenographic jargon of the office. She could lengthen out all Gill’s abbreviations, interpret all his allusions, and reconstruct Dick’s answers from the questions addressed to him. And when the door closed on the architect she was left face to face with the fact that her son, unknown to any one but herself, was using Darrow’s drawings to

complete his work.

Mrs. Peyton, left alone, found it easier to continue her vigil by the drawing-room fire than to carry up to the darkness and silence of her own room the truth she had been at such pains to acquire. She had no thought of sitting up for Dick. Doubtless, his dinner over, he would rejoin Gill at the office, and prolong through the night the task in which she now knew him to be engaged. But it was less lonely by the fire than in the wide-eyed darkness which awaited her upstairs. A mortal loneliness enveloped her. She felt as though she had fallen by the way, spent and broken in a struggle of which even its object had been unconscious. She had tried to deflect the natural course of events, she had sacrificed her personal happiness to a fantastic ideal of duty, and it was her punishment to be left alone with her failure, outside the normal current of human strivings and regrets.

She had no wish to see her son just then: she would have preferred to let the inner tumult subside, to repossess herself in this new adjustment to life, before meeting his eyes again. But as she sat there, far adrift on her misery, she was aroused by the turning of his key in the latch. She started up, her heart sounding a retreat, but her faculties too dispersed to obey it; and while she stood wavering, the door opened and he was in the room.

In the room, and with face illumined: a Dick she had not seen since the strain of the contest had cast its shade on him. Now he shone as if in a sunrise of victory, holding out exultant hands from which she hung back instinctively.

“Mother! I knew you’d be waiting for me!” He had her on his breast now, and his kisses were in her hair. “I’ve always said you knew everything that was happening to me, and now you’ve guessed that I wanted you to-night.”

She was struggling faintly against the dear endearments. “What *has* happened?” she murmured, drawing back for a dazzled look at him.

He had drawn her to the sofa, had dropped beside her, regaining his hold of her in the boyish need that his happiness should be touched and handled.

"My engagement has happened!" he cried out to her. "You stupid dear, do you need to be told?"

VII

She had indeed needed to be told: the surprise was complete and overwhelming. She sat silent under it, her hands trembling in his, till the blood mounted to his face and she felt his confident grasp relax.

"You didn't guess it, then?" he exclaimed, starting up and moving away from her.

"No; I didn't guess it," she confessed in a dead-level voice.

He stood above her, half challenging, half defensive. "And you haven't a word to say to me? Mother!" he adjured her.

She rose too, putting her arms about him with a kiss.

"Dick! Dear Dick!" she murmured.

"She imagines you don't like her; she says she's always felt it. And yet she owns you've been delightful, that you've tried to make friends with her. And I thought you knew how much it would mean to me, just now, to have this uncertainty over, and that you'd actually been trying to help me, to put in a good word for me. I thought it was you who had made her decide."

"I?"

"By your talk with her the other day. She told me of your talk with her."

His mother's hands slipped from his shoulders and she sank back into her seat. She felt the cruelty of her silence, but only an inarticulate murmur found a way to her lips. Before speaking she must clear a space in the suffocating rush of her sensations. For the moment she could only repeat inwardly that Clemence Verney had yielded before the final test, and that she herself was somehow responsible for this fresh entanglement of fate. For she saw in a flash

how the coils of circumstance had tightened; and as her mind cleared it was filled with the perception that this, precisely, was what the girl intended, that this was why she had conferred the crown before the victory. By pledging herself to Dick she had secured his pledge in return: had put him on his honour in a cynical inversion of the term. Kate saw the succession of events spread out before her like a map, and the astuteness of the girl's policy frightened her. Miss Verney had conducted the campaign like a strategist. She had frankly owned that her interest in Dick's future depended on his capacity for success, and in order to key him up to his first achievement she had given him a foretaste of its results.

So much was almost immediately clear to Mrs. Peyton; but in a moment her inferences had carried her a point farther. For it was now plain to her that Miss Verney had not risked so much without first trying to gain her point at less cost: that if she had had to give herself as a prize, it was because no other bribe had been sufficient. This then, as the mother saw with a throb of hope, meant that Dick, who since Darrow's death had held to his purpose unwaveringly, had been deflected from it by the first hint of Clemence Verney's connivance. Kate had not miscalculated: things had happened as she had foreseen. In the light of the girl's approval his act had taken an odious look. He had recoiled from it, and it was to revive his flagging courage that she had had to promise herself, to take him in the meshes of her surrender.

Kate, looking up, saw above her the young perplexity of her boy's face, the suspended happiness waiting to brim over. With a fresh touch of misery she said to herself that this was his hour, his one irrecoverable moment, and that she was darkening it by her silence. Her memory went back to the same hour in her own life: she could feel its heat in her pulses still. What right had she to stand in Dick's light? Who was she to decide between his code and hers? She put out her hand and drew him down to her.

"She'll be the making of me, you know, mother," he said, as they

leaned together. "She'll put new life in me—she'll help me get my second wind. Her talk is like a fresh breeze blowing away the fog in my head. I never knew any one who saw so straight to the heart of things, who had such a grip on values. She goes straight up to life and catches hold of it, and you simply can't make her let go."

He got up and walked the length of the room; then he came back and stood smiling above his mother.

"You know you and I are rather complicated people," he said. "We're always walking around things to get new views of them—we're always rearranging the furniture. And somehow she simplifies life so tremendously." He dropped down beside her with a deprecating laugh. "Not that I mean, dear, that it hasn't been good for me to argue things out with myself, as you've taught me to—only the man who stops to talk is apt to get shoved aside nowadays, and I don't believe Milton's archangels would have had much success in active business."

He had begun in a strain of easy confidence, but as he went on she detected an effort to hold the note, she felt that his words were being poured out in a vain attempt to fill the silence which was deepening between them. She longed, in her turn, to pour something into that menacing void, to bridge it with a reconciling word or look; but her soul hung back, and she had to take refuge in a vague murmur of tenderness.

"My boy! My boy!" she repeated; and he sat beside her without speaking, their hand-clasp alone spanning the distance which had widened between their thoughts.

The engagement, as Kate subsequently learned, was not to be made known till later. Miss Verney had even stipulated that for the present there should be no recognition of it in her own family or in Dick's. She did not wish to interfere with his final work for the competition, and had made him promise, as he laughingly owned, that he would not see her again till the drawings were sent in. His

mother noticed that he made no other allusion to his work; but when he bade her good-night he added that he might not see her the next morning, as he had to go to the office early. She took this as a hint that he wished to be left alone, and kept her room the next day till the closing door told her that he was out of the house.

She herself had waked early, and it seemed to her that the day was already old when she came downstairs. Never had the house appeared so empty. Even in Dick's longest absences something of his presence had always hung about the rooms: a fine dust of memories and associations, which wanted only the evocation of her thought to float into a palpable semblance of him. But now he seemed to have taken himself quite away, to have broken every fibre by which their lives had hung together. Where the sense of him had been there was only a deeper emptiness: she felt as if a strange man had gone out of the house.

She wandered from room to room, aimlessly, trying to adjust herself to their solitude. She had known such loneliness before, in the years when most women's hearts are fullest; but that was long ago, and the solitude had after all been less complete, because of the sense that it might still be filled. Her son had come: her life had brimmed over; but now the tide ebbed again, and she was left gazing over a bare stretch of wasted years. Wasted! There was the mortal pang, the stroke from which there was no healing. Her faith and hope had been marsh-lights luring her to the wilderness, her love a vain edifice reared on shifting ground.

In her round of the rooms she came at last to Dick's study upstairs. It was full of his boyhood: she could trace the history of his past in its quaint relics and survivals, in the school-books lingering on his crowded shelves, the school-photographs and college-trophies hung among his later treasures. All his successes and failures, his exaltations and inconsistencies, were recorded in the warm huddled heterogeneous room. Everywhere she saw the touch of her own hand, the vestiges of her own steps. It was she alone who held the

clue to the labyrinth, who could thread a way through the confusions and contradictions of his past; and her soul rejected the thought that his future could ever escape from her. She dropped down into his shabby college armchair and hid her face in the papers on his desk.

VIII

The day dwelt in her memory as a long stretch of aimless hours: blind alleys of time that led up to a dead wall of inaction.

Toward afternoon she remembered that she had promised to dine out and go to the opera. At first she felt that the contact of life would be unendurable; then she shrank from shutting herself up with her misery. In the end she let herself drift passively on the current of events, going through the mechanical routine of the day without much consciousness of what was happening.

At twilight, as she sat in the drawing-room, the evening paper was brought in, and in glancing over it her eye fell on a paragraph which seemed printed in more vivid type than the rest. It was headed, *The New Museum of Sculpture*, and underneath she read: "The artists and architects selected to pass on the competitive designs for the new Museum will begin their sittings on Monday, and to-morrow is the last day on which designs may be sent in to the committee. Great interest is felt in the competition, as the conspicuous site chosen for the new building, and the exceptionally large sum voted by the city for its erection, offer an unusual field for the display of architectural ability."

She leaned back, closing her eyes. It was as though a clock had struck, loud and inexorably, marking off some irrecoverable hour. She was seized by a sudden longing to seek Dick out, to fall on her knees and plead with him: it was one of those physical obsessions against which the body has to stiffen its muscles as well as the mind its thoughts. Once she even sprang up to ring for a cab; but she sank back again, breathing as if after a struggle, and gripping the arms of her chair to keep herself down.

“I can only wait for him—only wait for him—” she heard herself say; and the words loosened the sobs in her throat.

At length she went upstairs to dress for dinner. A ghost-like self looked back at her from her toilet-glass: she watched it performing the mechanical gestures of the toilet, dressing her, as it appeared, without help from her actual self. Each little act stood out sharply against the blurred background of her brain: when she spoke to her maid her voice sounded extraordinarily loud. Never had the house been so silent; or, stay—yes, once she had felt the same silence, once when Dick, in his school-days, had been ill of a fever, and she had sat up with him on the decisive night. The silence had been as deep and as terrible then; and as she dressed she had before her the vision of his room, of the cot in which he lay, of his restless head working a hole in the pillow, his face so pinched and alien under the familiar freckles. It might be his death-watch she was keeping: the doctors had warned her to be ready. And in the silence her soul had fought for her boy, her love had hung over him like wings, her abundant useless hateful life had struggled to force itself into his empty veins. And she had succeeded, she had saved him, she had poured her life into him; and in place of the strange child she had watched all night, at daylight she held her own boy to her breast.

That night had once seemed to her the most dreadful of her life; but she knew now that it was one of the agonies which enrich, that the passion thus spent grows fourfold from its ashes. She could not have borne to keep this new vigil alone. She must escape from its sterile misery, must take refuge in other lives till she regained courage to face her own. At the opera, in the illumination of the first *entr’acte*, as she gazed about the house, wondering through the numb ache of her wretchedness how others could talk and smile and be indifferent, it seemed to her that all the jarring animation about her was suddenly focussed in the face of Clemence Verney. Miss Verney sat opposite, in the front of a crowded box, a box in which, continually, the black-coated background shifted and renewed itself.

Mrs. Peyton felt a throb of anger at the girl's bright air of unconcern. She forgot that she too was talking, smiling, holding out her hand to newcomers, in a studied mimicry of life, while her real self played out its tragedy behind the scenes. Then it occurred to her that, to Clemence Verney, there was no tragedy in the situation. According to the girl's calculations, Dick was virtually certain of success; and unsuccess was to her the only conceivable disaster.

All through the opera the sense of that opposing force, that negation of her own beliefs, burned itself into Mrs. Peyton's consciousness. The space between herself and the girl seemed to vanish, the throng about them to disperse, till they were face to face and alone, enclosed in their mortal enmity. At length the feeling of humiliation and defeat grew unbearable to Mrs. Peyton. The girl seemed to flout her in the insolence of victory, to sit there as the visible symbol of her failure. It was better after all to be at home alone with her thoughts.

As she drove away from the opera she thought of that other vigil which, only a few streets away, Dick was perhaps still keeping. She wondered if his work were over, if the final stroke had been drawn. And as she pictured him there, signing his pact with evil in the loneliness of the conniving night, an uncontrollable impulse possessed her. She must drive by his windows and see if they were still alight. She would not go up to him,—she dared not,—but at least she would pass near to him, would invisibly share his watch and hover on the edge of his thoughts. She lowered the window and called out the address to the coachman.

The tall office-building loomed silent and dark as she approached it; but presently, high up, she caught a light in the familiar windows. Her heart gave a leap, and the light swam on her through tears. The carriage drew up, and for a moment she sat motionless. Then the coachman bent down toward her, and she saw that he was asking if he should drive on. She tried to shape a yes, but her lips refused it, and she shook her head. He continued to lean down perplexedly, and

at length, under the interrogation of his attitude, it became impossible to sit still, and she opened the door and stepped out. It was equally impossible to stand on the sidewalk, and her next steps carried her to the door of the building. She groped for the bell and rang it, feeling still dimly accountable to the coachman for some consecutiveness of action, and after a moment the night watchman opened the door, drawing back amazed at the shining apparition which confronted him. Recognizing Mrs. Peyton, whom he had seen about the building by day, he tried to adapt himself to the situation by a vague stammer of apology.

“I came to see if my son is still here,” she faltered.

“Yes, ma’am, he’s here. He’s been here most nights lately till after twelve.”

“And is Mr. Gill with him?”

“No: Mr. Gill he went away just after I come on this evening.”

She glanced up into the cavernous darkness of the stairs. “Is he alone up there, do you think?”

“Yes, ma’am, I know he’s alone, because I seen his men leaving soon after Mr. Gill.”

Kate lifted her head quickly. “Then I will go up to him,” she said.

The watchman apparently did not think it proper to offer any comment on this unusual proceeding, and a moment later she was fluttering and rustling up through the darkness, like a night-bird hovering among rafters. There were ten flights to climb: at every one her breath failed her, and she had to stand still and press her hands against her heart. Then the weight on her breast lifted, and she went on again, upward and upward, the great dark building dropping away from her, in tier after tier of mute doors and mysterious corridors. At last she reached Dick’s floor, and saw the light shining down the passage from his door. She leaned against the wall, her breath coming short, the silence throbbing in her ears. Even now it was not too late to turn back. She bent over the stairs, letting her eyes plunge into the nether blackness, with the single glimmer of the

watchman's light in its depths; then she turned and stole toward her son's door.

There again she paused and listened, trying to catch, through the hum of her pulses, any noise that might come to her from within. But the silence was unbroken—it seemed as though the office must be empty. She pressed her ear to the door, straining for a sound. She knew he never sat long at his work, and it seemed unaccountable that she should not hear him moving about the drawing-board. For a moment she fancied he might be sleeping; but sleep did not come to him readily after prolonged mental effort—she recalled the restless straying of his feet above her head for hours after he returned from his night work in the office.

She began to fear that he might be ill. A nervous trembling seized her, and she laid her hand on the latch, whispering “Dick!”

Her whisper sounded loudly through the silence, but there was no answer, and after a pause she called again. With each call the hush seemed to deepen: it closed in on her, mysterious and impenetrable. Her heart was beating in short frightened leaps: a moment more and she would have cried out. She drew a quick breath and turned the door-handle.

The outer room, Dick's private office, with its red carpet and easy-chairs, stood in pleasant lamp-lit emptiness. The last time she had entered it, Darrow and Clemence Verney had been there, and she had sat behind the urn observing them. She paused a moment, struck now by a faint sound from beyond; then she slipped noiselessly across the carpet, pushed open the swinging door, and stood on the threshold of the work-room. Here the gas-lights hung a green-shaded circle of brightness over the great draughting-table in the middle of the floor. Table and floor were strewn with a confusion of papers—torn blue-prints and tracings, crumpled sheets of tracing-paper wrenched from the draughting-boards in a sudden fury of destruction; and in the centre of the havoc, his arms stretched across the table and his face hidden in them, sat Dick Peyton.

He did not seem to hear his mother's approach, and she stood looking at him, her breast tightening with a new fear.

"Dick!" she said, "Dick—!" and he sprang up, staring with dazed eyes. But gradually, as his gaze cleared, a light spread in it, a mounting brightness of recognition.

"You've come—you've come—" he said, stretching his hands to her; and all at once she had him in her breast as in a shelter.

"You wanted me?" she whispered as she held him.

He looked up at her, tired, breathless, with the white radiance of the runner near the goal.

"I *had* you, dear!" he said, smiling strangely on her; and her heart gave a great leap of understanding.

Her arms had slipped from his neck, and she stood leaning on him, deep-suffused in the shyness of her discovery. For it might still be that he did not wish her to know what she had done for him.

But he put his arm about her, boyishly, and drew her toward one of the hard seats between the tables; and there, on the bare floor, he knelt before her, and hid his face in her lap. She sat motionless, feeling the dear warmth of his head against her knees, letting her hands stray in faint caresses through his hair.

Neither spoke for awhile; then he raised his head and looked at her. "I suppose you know what has been happening to me," he said.

She shrank from seeming to press into his life a hair'sbreadth farther than he was prepared to have her go. Her eyes turned from him toward the scattered drawings on the table.

"You have given up the competition?" she said.

"Yes—and a lot more." He stood up, the wave of emotion ebbing, yet leaving him nearer, in his recovered calmness, than in the shock of their first moment.

"I didn't know, at first, how much you guessed," he went on quietly. "I was sorry I'd shown you Darrow's letter; but it didn't worry me much because I didn't suppose you'd think it possible that I should—take advantage of it. It's only lately that I've understood

that you knew everything.” He looked at her with a smile. “I don’t know yet how I found it out, for you’re wonderful about keeping things to yourself, and you never made a sign. I simply felt it in a kind of nearness—as if I couldn’t get away from you.—Oh, there were times when I should have preferred not having you about—when I tried to turn my back on you, to see things from other people’s standpoint. But you were always there—you wouldn’t be discouraged. And I got tired of trying to explain things to you, of trying to bring you round to my way of thinking. You wouldn’t go away and you wouldn’t come any nearer—you just stood there and watched everything that I was doing.”

He broke off, taking one of his restless turns down the long room. Then he drew up a chair beside her, and dropped into it with a great sigh.

“At first, you know, I hated it most awfully. I wanted to be let alone and to work out my own theory of things. If you’d said a word—if you’d tried to influence me—the spell would have been broken. But just because the actual *you* kept apart and didn’t meddle or pry, the other, the *you* in my heart, seemed to get a tighter hold on me. I don’t know how to tell you,—it’s all mixed up in my head—but old things you’d said and done kept coming back to me, crowding between me and what I was trying for, looking at me without speaking, like old friends I’d gone back on, till I simply couldn’t stand it any longer. I fought it off till to-night, but when I came back to finish the work there you were again—and suddenly, I don’t know how, you weren’t an obstacle any longer, but a refuge—and I crawled into your arms as I used to when things went against me at school.”

His hands stole back into hers, and he leaned his head against her shoulder like a boy.

“I’m an abysmally weak fool, you know,” he ended; “I’m not worth the fight you’ve put up for me. But I want you to know that it’s your doing—that if you had let go an instant I should have gone under—

and that if I'd gone under I should never have come up again alive."

The Descent of Man

WHEN Professor Linyard came back from his holiday in the Maine woods the air of rejuvenation he brought with him was due less to the influences of the climate than to the companionship he had enjoyed on his travels. To Mrs. Linyard's observant eye he had appeared to set out alone; but an invisible traveller had in fact accompanied him, and if his heart beat high it was simply at the pitch of his adventure: for the Professor had eloped with an idea.

No one who has not tried the experiment can divine its exhilaration. Professor Linyard would not have changed places with any hero of romance pledged to a flesh-and-blood abduction. The most fascinating female is apt to be encumbered with luggage and scruples: to take up a good deal of room in the present and overlap inconveniently into the future; whereas an idea can accommodate itself to a single molecule of the brain or expand to the circumference of the horizon. The Professor's companion had to the utmost this quality of adaptability. As the express train whirled him away from the somewhat inelastic circle of Mrs. Linyard's affections, his idea seemed to be sitting opposite him, and their eyes met every moment or two in a glance of joyous complicity; yet when a friend of the family presently joined him and began to talk about college matters, the idea slipped out of sight in a flash, and the Professor would have had no difficulty in proving that he was alone.

But if, from the outset, he found his idea the most agreeable of fellow-travellers, it was only in the aromatic solitude of the woods that he tasted the full savour of his adventure. There, during the long

cool August days, lying full length on the pine-needles and gazing up into the sky, he would meet the eyes of his companion bending over him like a nearer heaven. And what eyes they were!—clear yet unfathomable, bubbling with inexhaustible laughter, yet drawing their freshness and sparkle from the central depths of thought! To a man who for twenty years had faced an eye reflecting the commonplace with perfect accuracy, these escapes into the inscrutable had always been peculiarly inviting; but hitherto the Professor's mental infidelities had been restricted by an unbroken and relentless domesticity. Now, for the first time since his marriage, chance had given him six weeks to himself, and he was coming home with his lungs full of liberty.

It must not be inferred that the Professor's domestic relations were defective: they were in fact so complete that it was almost impossible to get away from them. It is the happy husbands who are really in bondage; the little rift within the lute is often a passage to freedom. Marriage had given the Professor exactly what he had sought in it: a comfortable lining to life. The impossibility of rising to sentimental crises had made him scrupulously careful not to shirk the practical obligations of the bond. He took as it were a sociological view of his case, and modestly regarded himself as a brick in that foundation on which the state is supposed to rest. Perhaps if Mrs. Linyard had cared about entomology, or had taken sides in the war over the transmission of acquired characteristics, he might have had a less impersonal notion of marriage; but he was unconscious of any deficiency in their relation, and if consulted would probably have declared that he didn't want any woman bothering with his beetles. His real life had always lain in the universe of thought, in that enchanted region which, to those who have lingered there, comes to have so much more colour and substance than the painted curtain hanging before it. The Professor's particular veil of Maia was a narrow strip of homespun woven in a monotonous pattern; but he had only to lift it to step into an empire.

This unseen universe was thronged with the most seductive shapes: the Professor moved Sultan-like through a seraglio of ideas. But of all the lovely apparitions that wove their spells about him, none had ever worn quite so persuasive an aspect as this latest favourite. For the others were mostly rather grave companions, serious-minded and elevating enough to have passed muster in a Ladies' Debating Club; but this new fancy of the Professor's was simply one embodied laugh. It was, in other words, the smile of relaxation at the end of a long day's toil: the flash of irony which the laborious mind projects, irresistibly, over labour conscientiously performed. The Professor had always been a hard worker. If he was an indulgent friend to his ideas he was also a stern taskmaster to them. For, in addition to their other duties, they had to support his family: to pay the butcher and baker, and provide for Jack's schooling and Millicent's dresses. The Professor's household was a modest one, yet it tasked his ideas to keep it up to his wife's standard. Mrs. Linyard was not an exacting wife, and she took enough pride in her husband's attainments to pay for her honours by turning Millicent's dresses and darning Jack's socks and going to the College receptions year after year in the same black silk with shiny seams. It consoled her to see an occasional mention of Professor Linyard's remarkable monograph on the Ethical Reactions of the Infusoria, or an allusion to his investigations into the Unconscious Cerebration of the Amoeba.

Still there were moments when the healthy indifference of Jack and Millicent reacted on the maternal sympathies; when Mrs. Linyard would have made her husband a railway director, if by this transformation she might have increased her boy's allowance and given her daughter a new hat, or a set of furs such as the other girls were wearing. Of such moments of rebellion the Professor himself was not wholly unconscious. He could not indeed understand why any one should want a new hat; and as to an allowance, he had had much less money at college than Jack, and had yet managed to buy a microscope and collect a few "specimens"; while Jack was free from

such expensive tastes! But the Professor did not let his want of sympathy interfere with the discharge of his paternal obligations. He worked hard to keep the wants of his family gratified, and it was precisely in the endeavour to attain this end that he at length broke down and had to cease from work altogether.

To cease from work was not to cease from thought of it; and in the unwonted pause from effort the Professor found himself taking a general survey of the field he had travelled. At last it was possible to lift his nose from the loom, to step a moment in front of the tapestry he had been weaving. From this first inspection of the pattern so long wrought over from behind, it was natural to glance a little farther and seek its reflection in the public eye. It was not indeed of his special task that he thought in this connection. He was but one of the great army of weavers at work among the threads of that cosmic woof; and what he sought was the general impression their labour had produced.

When Professor Linyard first plied his microscope, the audience of the man of science had been composed of a few fellow-students, sympathetic or hostile as their habits of mind predetermined, but versed in the jargon of the profession and familiar with the point of departure. In the intervening quarter of a century, however, this little group had been swallowed up in a larger public. Every one now read scientific books and expressed an opinion on them. The ladies and the clergy had taken them up first; now they had passed to the school-room and the kindergarten. Daily life was regulated on scientific principles; the daily papers had their "Scientific Jottings"; nurses passed examinations in hygienic science, and babies were fed and dandled according to the new psychology.

The very fact that scientific investigation still had, to some minds, the flavor of heterodoxy, gave it a perennial interest. The mob had broken down the walls of tradition to batten in the orchard of forbidden knowledge. The inaccessible goddess whom the Professor had served in his youth now offered her charms in the market-place.

And yet it was not the same goddess, after all, but a pseudo-science masquerading in the garb of the real divinity. This false goddess had her ritual and her literature. She had her sacred books, written by false priests and sold by millions to the faithful. In the most successful of these works, ancient dogma and modern discovery were depicted in a close embrace under the lime-lights of a hazy transcendentalism; and the tableau never failed of its effect. Some of the books designed on this popular model had lately fallen into the Professor's hands, and they filled him with mingled rage and hilarity. The rage soon died: he came to regard this mass of pseudo-literature as protecting the truth from desecration. But the hilarity remained, and flowed into the form of his idea. And the idea—the divine incomparable idea—was simply that he should avenge his goddess by satirising her false interpreters. He would write a skit on the “popular” scientific book; he would so heap platitude on platitude, fallacy on fallacy, false analogy on false analogy, so use his superior knowledge to abound in the sense of the ignorant, that even the gross crowd would join in the laugh against its augurs. And the laugh should be something more than the distention of mental muscles; it should be the trumpet-blast bringing down the walls of ignorance, or at least the little stone striking the giant between the eyes.

II

The Professor, on presenting his card, had imagined that it would command prompt access to the publisher's sanctuary; but the young man who read his name was not moved to immediate action. It was clear that Professor Linyard of Hillbridge University was not a specific figure to the purveyors of popular literature. But the publisher was an old friend; and when the card had finally drifted to his office on the languid tide of routine he came forth at once to greet his visitor.

The warmth of his welcome convinced the Professor that he had been right in bringing his manuscript to Ned Harviss. He and Harviss

had been at Hillbridge together, and the future publisher had been one of the wildest spirits in that band of college outlaws which yearly turns out so many inoffensive citizens and kind husbands and fathers. The Professor knew the taming qualities of life. He was aware that many of his most reckless comrades had been transformed into prudent capitalists or cowed wage-earners; but he was almost sure that he could count on Harviss. So rare a sense of irony, so keen a perception of relative values, could hardly have been blunted even by twenty years' intercourse with the obvious.

The publisher's appearance was a little disconcerting. He looked as if he had been fattened on popular fiction; and his fat was full of optimistic creases. The Professor seemed to see him bowing into the office a long train of spotless heroines laden with the maiden tribute of the hundredth thousand volume.

Nevertheless, his welcome was reassuring. He did not disown his early enormities, and capped his visitor's tentative allusions by such flagrant references to the past that the Professor produced his manuscript without a scruple.

"What—you don't mean to say you've been doing something in our line?"

The Professor smiled. "You publish scientific books sometimes, don't you?"

The publisher's optimistic creases relaxed a little. "H'm—it all depends—I'm afraid you're a little *too* scientific for us. We have a big sale for scientific breakfast foods, but not for the concentrated essences. In your case, of course, I should be delighted to stretch a point; but in your own interest I ought to tell you that perhaps one of the educational houses would do you better."

The Professor leaned back, still smiling luxuriously.

"Well, look it over—I rather think you'll take it."

"Oh, we'll *take* it, as I say; but the terms might not—"

"No matter about the terms—"

The publisher threw his head back with a laugh. "I had no idea

that science was so profitable; we find our popular novelists are the hardest hands at a bargain.”

“Science is disinterested,” the Professor corrected him. “And I have a fancy to have you publish this thing.”

“That’s immensely good of you, my dear fellow. Of course your name goes with a certain public—and I rather like the originality of our bringing out a work so out of our line. I daresay it may boom us both.” His creases deepened at the thought, and he shone encouragingly on the Professor’s leave-taking.

Within a fortnight, a line from Harviss recalled the Professor to town. He had been looking forward with immense zest to this second meeting; Harviss’s college roar was in his tympanum, and he could already hear the protracted chuckle which would follow his friend’s progress through the manuscript. He was proud of the adroitness with which he had kept his secret from Harviss, had maintained to the last the pretence of a serious work, in order to give the keener edge to his reader’s enjoyment. Not since under-graduate days had the Professor tasted such a draught of pure fun as his anticipations now poured for him.

This time his card brought instant admission. He was bowed into the office like a successful novelist, and Harviss grasped him with both hands.

“Well—do you mean to take it?” he asked with a lingering coquetry.

“Take it? Take it, my dear fellow? It’s in press already—you’ll excuse my not waiting to consult you? There will be no difficulty about terms, I assure you, and we had barely time to catch the autumn market. My dear Linyard, why didn’t you *tell* me?” His voice sank to a reproachful solemnity, and he pushed forward his own arm-chair.

The Professor dropped into it with a chuckle. “And miss the joy of letting you find out?”

“Well—it *was* a joy.” Harviss held out a box of his best cigars. “I

don't know when I've had a bigger sensation. It was so deucedly unexpected—and, my dear fellow, you've brought it so exactly to the right shop."

"I'm glad to hear you say so," said the Professor modestly.

Harviss laughed in rich appreciation. "I don't suppose you had a doubt of it; but of course I was quite unprepared. And it's so extraordinarily out of your line—"

The Professor took off his glasses and rubbed them with a slow smile.

"Would you have thought it so—at college?"

Harviss stared. "At college?—Why, you were the most iconoclastic devil—"

There was a perceptible pause. The Professor restored his glasses and looked at his friend. "Well—?" he said simply.

"Well—?" echoed the other, still staring. "Ah—I see; you mean that that's what explains it. The swing of the pendulum, and so forth. Well, I admit it's not an uncommon phenomenon. I've conformed myself, for example; most of our crowd have, I believe; but somehow I hadn't expected it of you."

The close observer might have detected a faint sadness under the official congratulation of his tone; but the Professor was too amazed to have an ear for such fine shades.

"Expected it of me? Expected what of me?" he gasped. "What in heaven do you think this thing is?" And he struck his fist on the manuscript which lay between them.

Harviss had recovered his optimistic creases. He rested a benevolent eye on the document.

"Why, your apologia—your confession of faith, I should call it. You surely must have seen which way you were going? You can't have written it in your sleep?"

"Oh, no, I was wide awake enough," said the Professor faintly.

"Well, then, why are you staring at me as if I were *not*?" Harviss leaned forward to lay a reassuring hand on his visitor's worn coat-

sleeve. "Don't mistake me, my dear Linyard. Don't fancy there was the least unkindness in my allusion to your change of front. What is growth but the shifting of the standpoint? Why should a man be expected to look at life with the same eyes at twenty and—at our age? It never occurred to me that you could feel the least delicacy in admitting that you have come round a little—have fallen into line, so to speak."

But the Professor had sprung up as if to give his lungs more room to expand; and from them there issued a laugh which shook the editorial rafters.

"Oh, Lord, oh, Lord—is it really as good as that?"

Harviss had glanced instinctively toward the electric bell on his desk; he was evidently prepared for an emergency.

"My dear fellow—" he began in a soothing tone.

"Oh, let me have my laugh out, do," implored the Professor. "I'll—I'll quiet down in a minute; you needn't ring for the young man." He dropped into his chair again and grasped its arms to steady his shaking. "This is the best laugh I've had since college," he brought out between his paroxysms. And then, suddenly, he sat up with a groan. "But if it's as good as that it's a failure!" he exclaimed.

Harviss, stiffening a little, examined the tip of his cigar. "My dear Linyard," he said at length, "I don't understand a word you're saying."

The Professor succumbed to a fresh access, from the vortex of which he managed to fling out—"But that's the very core of the joke!"

Harviss looked at him resignedly. "What is?"

"Why, your not seeing—your not understanding—"

"Not understanding *what*?"

"Why, what the book is meant to be." His laughter subsided again and he sat gazing thoughtfully at the publisher. "Unless it means," he wound up, "that I've over-shot the mark."

"If I am the mark, you certainly have," said Harviss, with a glance

at the clock.

The Professor caught the glance and interpreted it. "The book is a skit," he said, rising.

The other stared. "A skit? It's not serious, you mean?"

"Not to me—but it seems you've taken it so."

"You never told me—" began the publisher in a ruffled tone.

"No, I never told you," said the Professor.

Harviss sat staring at the manuscript between them. "I don't pretend to be up in such recondite forms of humour," he said stiffly. "Of course you address yourself to a very small class of readers."

"Oh, infinitely small," admitted the Professor, extending his hand toward the manuscript.

Harviss appeared to be pursuing his own train of thought. "That is," he continued, "if you insist on an ironical interpretation."

"If I insist on it—what do you mean?"

The publisher smiled faintly. "Well—isn't the book susceptible of another? If *I* read it without seeing—"

"Well?" murmured the other, fascinated.

—"why shouldn't the rest of the world?" declared Harviss boldly. "I represent the Average Reader—that's my business, that's what I've been training myself to do for the last twenty years. It's a mission like another—the thing is to do it thoroughly; not to cheat and compromise. I know fellows who are publishers in business hours and dilettantes the rest of the time. Well, they never succeed: convictions are just as necessary in business as in religion. But that's not the point—I was going to say that if you'll let me handle this book as a genuine thing I'll guarantee to make it go."

The Professor stood motionless, his hand still on the manuscript.

"A genuine thing?" he echoed.

"A serious piece of work—the expression of your convictions. I tell you there's nothing the public likes as much as convictions—they'll always follow a man who believes in his own ideas. And this book is just on the line of popular interest. You've got hold of a big thing. It's

full of hope and enthusiasm: it's written in the religious key. There are passages in it that would do splendidly in a Birthday Book—things that popular preachers would quote in their sermons. If you'd wanted to catch a big public you couldn't have gone about it in a better way. The thing's perfect for my purpose—I wouldn't let you alter a word of it. It will sell like a popular novel if you'll let me handle it in the right way."

III

When the Professor left Harviss's office the manuscript remained behind. He thought he had been taken by the huge irony of the situation—by the enlarged circumference of the joke. In its original form, as Harviss had said, the book would have addressed itself to a very limited circle: now it would include the world. The elect would understand; the crowd would not; and his work would thus serve a double purpose. And, after all, nothing was changed in the situation; not a word of the book was to be altered. The change was merely in the publisher's point of view, and in the "tip" he was to give the reviewers. The Professor had only to hold his tongue and look serious.

These arguments found a strong reinforcement in the large premium which expressed Harviss's sense of his opportunity. As a satire the book would have brought its author nothing; in fact, its cost would have come out of his own pocket, since, as Harviss assured him, no publisher would have risked taking it. But as a profession of faith, as the recantation of an eminent biologist, whose leanings had hitherto been supposed to be toward a cold determinism, it would bring in a steady income to author and publisher. The offer found the Professor in a moment of financial perplexity. His illness, his unwonted holiday, the necessity of postponing a course of well-paid lectures, had combined to diminish his resources; and when Harviss offered him an advance of a thousand dollars the esoteric savour of the joke became irresistible. It

was still as a joke that he persisted in regarding the transaction; and though he had pledged himself not to betray the real intent of the book, he held *in petto* the notion of some day being able to take the public into his confidence. As for the initiated, they would know at once: and however long a face he pulled his colleagues would see the tongue in his cheek. Meanwhile it fortunately happened that, even if the book should achieve the kind of triumph prophesied by Harviss, it would not appreciably injure its author's professional standing. Professor Linyard was known chiefly as a microscopist. On the structure and habits of a certain class of coleoptera he was the most distinguished living authority; but none save his intimate friends knew what generalizations on the destiny of man he had drawn from these special studies. He might have published a treatise on the Filioque without shaking the confidence of those on whose approval his reputation rested; and moreover he was sustained by the thought that one glance at his book would let them into its secret. In fact, so sure was he of this that he wondered the astute Harviss had cared to risk such speedy exposure. But Harviss had probably reflected that even in this reverberating age the opinions of the laboratory do not easily reach the street; and the Professor, at any rate, was not bound to offer advice on this point.

The determining cause of his consent was the fact that the book was already in press. The Professor knew little about the workings of the press, but the phrase gave him a sense of finality, of having been caught himself in the toils of that mysterious engine. If he had had time to think the matter over his scruples might have dragged him back; but his conscience was eased by the futility of resistance.

IV

Mrs. Linyard did not often read the papers; and there was therefore a special significance in her approaching her husband one evening after dinner with a copy of the *New York Investigator* in her hand. Her expression lent solemnity to the act: Mrs. Linyard had a limited but

distinctive set of expressions, and she now looked as she did when the President of the University came to dine.

“You didn’t tell me of this, Samuel,” she said in a slightly tremulous voice.

“Tell you of what?” returned the Professor, reddening to the margin of his baldness.

“That you had published a book—I might never have heard of it if Mrs. Pease hadn’t brought me the paper.”

Her husband rubbed his eye-glasses and groaned. “Oh, you would have heard of it,” he said gloomily.

Mrs. Linyard stared. “Did you wish to keep it from me, Samuel?” And as he made no answer, she added with irresistible pride: “Perhaps you don’t know what beautiful things have been said about it.”

He took the paper with a reluctant hand. “Has Pease been saying beautiful things about it?”

“The Professor? Mrs. Pease didn’t say he had mentioned it.”

The author heaved a sigh of relief. His book, as Harviss had prophesied, had caught the autumn market: had caught and captured it. The publisher had conducted the campaign like an experienced strategist. He had completely surrounded the enemy. Every newspaper, every periodical, held in ambush an advertisement of “The Vital Thing.” Weeks in advance the great commander had begun to form his lines of attack. Allusions to the remarkable significance of the coming work had appeared first in the scientific and literary reviews, spreading thence to the supplements of the daily journals. Not a moment passed without a quickening touch to the public consciousness: seventy millions of people were forced to remember at least once a day that Professor Linyard’s book was on the verge of appearing. Slips emblazoned with the question: *Have you read “The Vital Thing”?* fell from the pages of popular novels and whitened the floors of crowded streetcars. The query, in large lettering, assaulted the traveller at the railway bookstall, confronted

him on the walls of “elevated” stations, and seemed, in its ascending scale, about to supplant the interrogations as to sapolio and stove-polish which animate our rural scenery.

On the day of publication the Professor had withdrawn to his laboratory. The shriek of the advertisements was in his ears and his one desire was to avoid all knowledge of the event they heralded. A reaction of self-consciousness had set in, and if Harviss’s cheque had sufficed to buy up the first edition of “The Vital Thing” the Professor would gladly have devoted it to that purpose. But the sense of inevitableness gradually subdued him, and he received his wife’s copy of the *Investigator* with a kind of impersonal curiosity. The review was a long one, full of extracts: he saw, as he glanced over the latter, how well they would look in a volume of “Selections.” The reviewer began by thanking his author “for sounding with no uncertain voice that note of ringing optimism, of faith in man’s destiny and the supremacy of good, which has too long been silenced by the whining chorus of a decadent nihilism. . . . It is well,” the writer continued, “when such reminders come to us not from the moralist but from the man of science—when from the desiccating atmosphere of the laboratory there rises this glorious cry of faith and reconstruction.”

The review was minute and exhaustive. Thanks no doubt to Harviss’s diplomacy, it had been given to the *Investigator*’s “best man,” and the Professor was startled by the bold eye with which his emancipated fallacies confronted him. Under the reviewer’s handling they made up admirably as truths, and their author began to understand Harviss’s regret that they should be used for any less profitable purpose.

The *Investigator*, as Harviss phrased it, “set the pace,” and the other journals followed, finding it easier to let their critical man-of-all-work play a variation on the first reviewer’s theme than to secure an expert to “do” the book afresh. But it was evident that the Professor had captured his public, for all the resources of the profession could

not, as Harviss gleefully pointed out, have carried the book so straight to the heart of the nation. There was something noble in the way in which Harviss belittled his own share in the achievement, and insisted on the inutility of shoving a book which had started with such headway on.

"All I ask you is to admit that I saw what would happen," he said with a touch of professional pride. "I knew you'd struck the right note—I knew they'd be quoting you from Maine to San Francisco. Good as fiction? It's better—it'll keep going longer."

"Will it?" said the Professor with a slight shudder. He was resigned to an ephemeral triumph, but the thought of the book's persistency frightened him.

"I should say so! Why, you fit in everywhere—science, theology, natural history—and then the all-for-the-best element which is so popular just now. Why, you come right in with the How-to-Relax series, and they sell way up in the millions. And then the book's so full of tenderness—there are such lovely things in it about flowers and children. I didn't know an old Dryasdust like you could have such a lot of sentiment in him. Why, I actually caught myself snivelling over that passage about the snowdrops piercing the frozen earth; and my wife was saying the other day that, since she's read 'The Vital Thing,' she begins to think you must write the 'What-Cheer Column,' in the *Inglenook*." He threw back his head with a laugh which ended in the inspired cry: "And, by George, sir, when the thing begins to slow off we'll start somebody writing against it, and that will run us straight up into another hundred thousand."

And as earnest of this belief he drew the Professor a supplementary cheque.

V

Mrs. Linyard's knock cut short the importunities of the lady who had been trying to persuade the Professor to be taken by flashlight at his study-table for the Christmas number of the *Inglenook*. On this

point the Professor had fancied himself impregnable; but the unwonted smile with which he welcomed his wife's intrusion showed that his defences were weakening.

The lady from the *Inglenook* took the hint with professional promptness, but said brightly, as she snapped the elastic around her note-book: "I sha'n't let you forget me, Professor."

The groan with which he followed her retreat was interrupted by his wife's question: "Do they pay you for these interviews, Samuel?"

The Professor looked at her with sudden attention. "Not directly," he said, wondering at her expression.

She sank down with a sigh. "Indirectly, then?"

"What is the matter, my dear? I gave you Harviss's second cheque the other day—"

Her tears arrested him. "Don't be hard on the boy, Samuel! I really believe your success has turned his head."

"The boy—what boy? My success—? Explain yourself, Susan!"

"It's only that Jack has—has borrowed some money—which he can't repay. But you mustn't think him altogether to blame, Samuel. Since the success of your book he has been asked about so much—it's given the children quite a different position. Millicent says that wherever they go the first question asked is, 'Are you any relation of the author of "The Vital Thing"?' Of course we're all very proud of the book; but it entails obligations which you may not have thought of in writing it."

The Professor sat gazing at the letters and newspaper clippings on the study-table which he had just successfully defended from the camera of the *Inglenook*. He took up an envelope bearing the name of a popular weekly paper.

"I don't know that the *Inglenook* would help much," he said, "but I suppose this might."

Mrs. Linyard's eyes glowed with maternal avidity. "What is it, Samuel?"

"A series of 'Scientific Sermons' for the Round-the-Gas-Log column

of *The Woman's World*. I believe that journal has a larger circulation than any other weekly, and they pay in proportion."

He had not even asked the extent of Jack's indebtedness. It had been so easy to relieve recent domestic difficulties by the timely production of Harviss's two cheques that it now seemed natural to get Mrs. Linyard out of the room by promising further reinforcements. The Professor had indignantly rejected Harviss's suggestion that he should follow up his success by a second volume on the same lines. He had sworn not to lend more than a passive support to the fraud of "The Vital Thing"; but the temptation to free himself from Mrs. Linyard prevailed over his last scruples, and within an hour he was at work on the Scientific Sermons.

The Professor was not an unkind man. He really enjoyed making his family happy; and it was his own business if his reward for so doing was that it kept them out of his way. But the success of "The Vital Thing" gave him more than this negative satisfaction. It enlarged his own existence and opened new doors into other lives. The Professor, during fifty virtuous years, had been cognizant of only two types of women: the fond and foolish, whom one married, and the earnest and intellectual, whom one did not. Of the two, he infinitely preferred the former, even for conversational purposes. But as a social instrument woman was unknown to him; and it was not till he was drawn into the world on the tide of his literary success that he discovered the deficiencies in his classification of the sex. Then he learned with astonishment of the existence of a third type: the woman who is fond without foolishness and intellectual without earnestness. Not that the Professor inspired, or sought to inspire, sentimental emotions; but he expanded in the warm atmosphere of personal interest which some of his new acquaintances contrived to create about him. It was delightful to talk of serious things in a setting of frivolity, and to be personal without being domestic.

Even in this new world, where all subjects were touched on lightly, and emphasis was the only indelicacy, the Professor found himself

constrained to endure an occasional reference to his book. It was unpleasant at first; but gradually he slipped into the habit of hearing it talked of, and grew accustomed to telling pretty women just how "it had first come to him."

Meanwhile the success of the Scientific Sermons was facilitating his family relations. His photograph in the *Inglenook*, to which the lady of the note-book had succeeded in appending a vivid interview, carried his fame to circles inaccessible even to "The Vital Thing"; and the Professor found himself the man of the hour. He soon grew used to the functions of the office, and gave out hundred-dollar interviews on every subject, from labour-strikes to Babism, with a frequency which reacted agreeably on the domestic exchequer. Presently his head began to figure in the advertising pages of the magazines. Admiring readers learned the name of the only breakfast-food in use at his table, of the ink with which "The Vital Thing" had been written, the soap with which the author's hands were washed, and the tissue-builder which fortified him for further effort. These confidences endeared the Professor to millions of readers, and his head passed in due course from the magazine and the newspaper to the biscuit-tin and the chocolate-box.

VI

The Professor, all the while, was leading a double life. While the author of "The Vital Thing" reaped the fruits of popular approval, the distinguished microscopist continued his laboratory work unheeded save by the few who were engaged in the same line of investigations. His divided allegiance had not hitherto affected the quality of his work: it seemed to him that he returned to the laboratory with greater zest after an afternoon in a drawing-room where readings from "The Vital Thing" had alternated with plantation melodies and tea. He had long ceased to concern himself with what his colleagues thought of his literary career. Of the few whom he frequented, none had referred to "The Vital Thing"; and he knew enough of their lives

to guess that their silence might as fairly be attributed to indifference as to disapproval. They were intensely interested in the Professor's views on beetles but they really cared very little what he thought of the Almighty.

The Professor entirely shared their feelings, and one of his chief reasons for cultivating the success which accident had bestowed on him, was that it enabled him to command a greater range of appliances for his real work. He had known what it was to lack books and instruments; and "The Vital Thing" was the magic wand which summoned them to his aid. For some time he had been feeling his way along the edge of a discovery: balancing himself with professional skill on a plank of hypothesis flung across an abyss of uncertainty. The conjecture was the result of years of patient gathering of facts: its corroboration would take months more of comparison and classification. But at the end of the vista victory loomed. The Professor felt within himself that assurance of ultimate justification which, to the man of science, makes a life-time seem the mere comma between premiss and deduction. But he had reached the point where his conjectures required formulation. It was only by giving them expression, by exposing them to the comment and criticism of his associates, that he could test their final value; and this inner assurance was confirmed by the only friend whose confidence he invited.

Professor Pease, the husband of the lady who had opened Mrs. Linyard's eyes to the triumph of "The Vital Thing," was the repository of her husband's scientific experiences. What he thought of "The Vital Thing" had never been divulged; and he was capable of such vast exclusions that it was quite possible that pervasive work had not yet reached him. In any case, it was not likely to affect his judgment of the author's professional capacity.

"You want to put that all in a book, Linyard," was Professor Pease's conclusion, after listening to the summary of his friend's projected work. "I'm sure you've got hold of something big; but to

see it clearly yourself you ought to outline it for others. Take my advice—chuck everything else and get to work to-morrow. It's time you wrote a book, anyhow."

It's time you wrote a book, anyhow! The words smote the Professor with mingled pain and ecstasy: he could have wept over their significance. But his friend's other phrase reminded him with a start of Harviss. "You have got hold of a big thing—" it had been the publisher's first comment on "The Vital Thing." But what a world of meaning lay between the two phrases! It was the world in which the powers who fought for the Professor were destined to wage their final battle; and for the moment he had no doubt of the outcome.

"By George, I'll do it, Pease!" he said, stretching his hand to his friend.

The next day he went to town to see Harviss. He wanted to ask for an advance on the new popular edition of "The Vital Thing." He had determined to drop a course of supplementary lectures at the University and to give himself up for a year to his book. To do this additional funds were necessary; but thanks to "The Vital Thing" they would be forthcoming.

The publisher received him as cordially as usual; but the response to his demand was not as prompt as his previous experience had entitled him to expect.

"Of course we'll be glad to do what we can for you, Linyard; but the fact is we've decided to give up the idea of the new edition for the present."

"You've given up the new edition?"

"Why, yes—we've done pretty well by 'The Vital Thing,' and we're inclined to think it's *your* turn to do something for it now."

The Professor looked at him blankly. "What can I do for it?" he asked—"what *more*" his accent added.

"Why, put a little new life in it by writing something else. The secret of perpetual motion hasn't yet been discovered, you know, and it's one of the laws of literature that books which start with a rush

are apt to slow down sooner than the crawlers. We've kept 'The Vital Thing' going for eighteen months—but, hang it, it ain't so vital any more. We simply couldn't see our way to a new edition. Oh, I don't say it's dead yet—but it's moribund, and you're the only man who can resuscitate it."

The Professor continued to stare. "I—what can I do about it?" he stammered.

"Do? Why, write another like it—go it one better: you know the trick. The public isn't tired of you by any means; but you want to make yourself heard again before anybody else cuts in. Write another book—write two, and we'll sell them in sets in a box: The Vital Thing Series. That will take tremendously in the holidays. Try and let us have a new volume by October—I'll be glad to give you a big advance if you'll sign a contract on that."

The Professor sat silent: there was too cruel an irony in the coincidence.

Harviss looked up at him in surprise.

"Well, what's the matter with taking my advice—you're not going out of literature, are you?"

The Professor rose from his chair. "No—I'm going into it," he said simply.

"Going into it?"

"I'm going to write a real book—a serious one."

"Good Lord! Most people think 'The Vital Thing' 's serious."

"Yes—but I mean something different."

"In your old line—beetles and so forth?"

"Yes," said the Professor solemnly.

Harviss looked at him with equal gravity. "Well, I'm sorry for that," he said, "because it takes you out of our bailiwick. But I suppose you've made enough money out of 'The Vital Thing' to permit yourself a little harmless amusement. When you want more cash come back to us—only don't put it off too long, or some other fellow will have stepped into your shoes. Popularity don't keep, you

know; and the hotter the success the quicker the commodity perishes.”

He leaned back, cheerful and sententious, delivering his axioms with conscious kindliness.

The Professor, who had risen and moved to the door, turned back with a wavering step.

“When did you say another volume would have to be ready?” he faltered.

“I said October—but call it a month later. You don’t need any pushing nowadays.”

“And—you’d have no objection to letting me have a little advance now? I need some new instruments for my real work.”

Harviss extended a cordial hand. “My dear fellow, that’s talking—I’ll write the cheque while you wait; and I daresay we can start up the cheap edition of ‘The Vital Thing’ at the same time, if you’ll pledge yourself to give us the book by November.—How much?” he asked, poised above his cheque-book.

In the street, the Professor stood staring about him, uncertain and a little dazed.

“After all, it’s only putting it off for six months,” he said to himself; “and I can do better work when I get my new instruments.”

He smiled and raised his hat to the passing victoria of a lady in whose copy of “The Vital Thing” he had recently written:

Labor est etiam ipsa voluptas.

The Mission of Jane

LETHBURY, surveying his wife across the dinner table, found his transient glance arrested by an indefinable change in her appearance.

“How smart you look! Is that a new gown?” he asked.

Her answering look seemed to deprecate his charging her with the extravagance of wasting a new gown on him, and he now perceived that the change lay deeper than any accident of dress. At the same time, he noticed that she betrayed her consciousness of it by a delicate, almost frightened blush. It was one of the compensations of Mrs. Lethbury’s protracted childishness that she still blushed as prettily as at eighteen. Her body had been privileged not to outstrip her mind, and the two, as it seemed to Lethbury, were destined to travel together through an eternity of girlishness.

“I don’t know what you mean,” she said.

Since she never did, he always wondered at her bringing this out as a fresh grievance against him; but his wonder was unresentful, and he said good-humouredly: “You sparkle so that I thought you had on your diamonds.”

She sighed and blushed again.

“It must be,” he continued, “that you’ve been to a dressmaker’s opening. You’re absolutely brimming with illicit enjoyment.”

She stared again, this time at the adjective. His adjectives always embarrassed her: their unintelligibleness savoured of impropriety.

“In short,” he summed up, “you’ve been doing something that you’re thoroughly ashamed of.”

To his surprise she retorted: “I don’t see why I should be ashamed

of it!"

Lethbury leaned back with a smile of enjoyment. When there was nothing better going he always liked to listen to her explanations.

"Well—?" he said.

She was becoming breathless and ejaculatory. "Of course you'll laugh—you laugh at everything!"

"That rather blunts the point of my derision, doesn't it?" he interjected; but she pushed on without noticing:

"It's so easy to laugh at things."

"Ah," murmured Lethbury with relish, "that's Aunt Sophronia's, isn't it?"

Most of his wife's opinions were heirlooms, and he took a quaint pleasure in tracing their descent. She was proud of their age, and saw no reason for discarding them while they were still serviceable. Some, of course, were so fine that she kept them for state occasions, like her great-grandmother's Crown Derby; but from the lady known as Aunt Sophronia she had inherited a stout set of every-day prejudices that were practically as good as new; whereas her husband's, as she noticed, were always having to be replaced. In the early days she had fancied there might be a certain satisfaction in taxing him with the fact; but she had long since been silenced by the reply: "My dear, I'm not a rich man, but I never use an opinion twice if I can help it."

She was reduced, therefore, to dwelling on his moral deficiencies; and one of the most obvious of these was his refusal to take things seriously. On this occasion, however, some ulterior purpose kept her from taking up his taunt.

"I'm not in the least ashamed!" she repeated, with the air of shaking a banner to the wind; but the domestic atmosphere being calm, the banner drooped unheroically.

"That," said Lethbury judicially, "encourages me to infer that you ought to be, and that, consequently, you've been giving yourself the unusual pleasure of doing something I shouldn't approve of."

She met this with an almost solemn directness. "No," she said. "You won't approve of it. I've allowed for that."

"Ah," he exclaimed, setting down his liqueur-glass. "You've worked out the whole problem, eh?"

"I believe so."

"That's uncommonly interesting. And what is it?"

She looked at him quietly. "A baby."

If it was seldom given her to surprise him, she had attained the distinction for once.

"A baby?"

"Yes."

"A—human baby?"

"Of course!" she cried, with the virtuous resentment of the woman who has never allowed dogs in the house.

Lethbury's puzzled stare broke into a fresh smile. "A baby I sha'n't approve of? Well, in the abstract I don't think much of them, I admit. Is this an abstract baby?"

Again she frowned at the adjective; but she had reached a pitch of exaltation at which such obstacles could not deter her.

"It's the loveliest baby—" she murmured.

"Ah, then it's concrete. It exists. In this harsh world it draws its breath in pain—"

"It's the healthiest child I ever saw!" she indignantly corrected.

"You've seen it, then?"

Again the accusing blush suffused her. "Yes—I've seen it."

"And to whom does the paragon belong?"

And here indeed she confounded him. "To me—I hope," she declared.

He pushed his chair back with an articulate murmur. "To *you*—?"

"To *us*," she corrected.

"Good Lord!" he said. If there had been the least hint of hallucination in her transparent gaze—but no: it was as clear, as shallow, as easily fathomable as when he had first suffered the sharp

surprise of striking bottom in it.

It occurred to him that perhaps she was trying to be funny: he knew that there is nothing more cryptic than the humour of the unhumorous.

"Is it a joke?" he faltered.

"Oh, I hope not. I want it so much to be a reality—"

He paused to smile at the limitations of a world in which jokes were not realities, and continued gently: "But since it is one already —"

"To us, I mean: to you and me. I want—" her voice wavered, and her eyes with it. "I have always wanted so dreadfully . . . it has been such a disappointment . . . not to . . ."

"I see," said Lethbury slowly.

But he had not seen before. It seemed curious now that he had never thought of her taking it in that way, had never surmised any hidden depths beneath her outspread obviousness. He felt as though he had touched a secret spring in her mind.

There was a moment's silence, moist and tremulous on her part, awkward and slightly irritated on his.

"You've been lonely, I suppose?" he began. It was odd, having suddenly to reckon with the stranger who gazed at him out of her trivial eyes.

"At times," she said.

"I'm sorry."

"It was not your fault. A man has so many occupations; and women who are clever—or very handsome—I suppose that's an occupation too. Sometimes I've felt that when dinner was ordered I had nothing to do till the next day."

"Oh," he groaned.

"It wasn't your fault," she insisted. "I never told you—but when I chose that rose-bud paper for the front room upstairs, I always thought—"

"Well—?"

"It would be such a pretty paper—for a baby—to wake up in. That was years ago, of course; but it was rather an expensive paper . . . and it hasn't faded in the least . . ." she broke off incoherently.

"It hasn't faded?"

"No—and so I thought . . . as we don't use the room for anything . . . now that Aunt Sophronia is dead . . . I thought I might . . . you might . . . oh, Julian, if you could only have seen it just waking up in its crib!"

"Seen what—where? You haven't got a baby upstairs?"

"Oh, no—not *yet*," she said, with her rare laugh—the girlish bubbling of merriment that had seemed one of her chief graces in the early days. It occurred to him that he had not given her enough things to laugh about lately. But then she needed such very elementary things: she was as difficult to amuse as a savage. He concluded that he was not sufficiently simple.

"Alice," he said almost solemnly, "what *do* you mean?"

She hesitated a moment: he saw her gather her courage for a supreme effort. Then she said slowly, gravely, as though she were pronouncing a sacramental phrase:

"I'm so lonely without a little child—and I thought perhaps you'd let me adopt one. . . . It's at the hospital . . . its mother is dead . . . and I could . . . pet it, and dress it, and do things for it . . . and it's such a good baby . . . you can ask any of the nurses . . . it would never, *never* bother you by crying . . ."

II

Lethbury accompanied his wife to the hospital in a mood of chastened wonder. It did not occur to him to oppose her wish. He knew, of course, that he would have to bear the brunt of the situation: the jokes at the club, the enquiries, the explanations. He saw himself in the comic rôle of the adopted father and welcomed it as an expiation. For in his rapid reconstruction of the past he found himself cutting a shabbier figure than he cared to admit. He had

always been intolerant of stupid people, and it was his punishment to be convicted of stupidity. As his mind traversed the years between his marriage and this unexpected assumption of paternity, he saw, in the light of an overheated imagination, many signs of unwonted crassness. It was not that he had ceased to think his wife stupid: she *was* stupid, limited, inflexible; but there was a pathos in the struggles of her swaddled mind, in its blind reachings toward the primal emotions. He had always thought she would have been happier with a child; but he had thought it mechanically, because it had so often been thought before, because it was in the nature of things to think it of every woman, because his wife was so eminently one of a species that she fitted into all the generalisations of the sex. But he had regarded this generalisation as merely typical of the triumph of tradition over experience. Maternity was no doubt the supreme function of primitive woman, the one end to which her whole organism tended; but the law of increasing complexity had operated in both sexes, and he had not seriously supposed that, outside the world of Christmas fiction and anecdotic art, such truisms had any special hold on the feminine imagination. Now he saw that the arts in question were kept alive by the vitality of the sentiments they appealed to.

Lethbury was in fact going through a rapid process of readjustment. His marriage had been a failure, but he had preserved toward his wife the exact fidelity of act that is sometimes supposed to excuse any divagation of feeling; so that, for years, the tie between them had consisted mainly in his abstaining from making love to other women. The abstention had not always been easy, for the world is surprisingly well-stocked with the kind of woman one ought to have married but did not; and Lethbury had not escaped the solicitation of such alternatives. His immunity had been purchased at the cost of taking refuge in the somewhat rarefied atmosphere of his perceptions; and his world being thus limited, he had given unusual care to its details, compensating himself for the narrowness of his

horizon by the minute finish of his foreground. It was a world of fine shadings and the nicest proportions, where impulse seldom set a blundering foot, and the feast of reason was undisturbed by an intemperate flow of soul. To such a banquet his wife naturally remained uninvited. The diet would have disagreed with her, and she would probably have objected to the other guests. But Lethbury, miscalculating her needs, had hitherto supposed that he had made ample provision for them, and was consequently at liberty to enjoy his own fare without any reproach of mendicancy at his gates. Now he beheld her pressing a starved face against the windows of his life, and in his imaginative reaction he invested her with a pathos borrowed from the sense of his own shortcomings.

In the hospital the imaginative process continued with increasing force. He looked at his wife with new eyes. Formerly she had been to him a mere bundle of negations, a labyrinth of dead walls and bolted doors. There was nothing behind the walls, and the doors led no whither: he had sounded and listened often enough to be sure of that. Now he felt like a traveller who, exploring some ancient ruin, comes on an inner cell, intact amid the general dilapidation, and painted with images which reveal the forgotten uses of the building.

His wife stood by a white crib in one of the wards. In the crib lay a child, a year old, the nurse affirmed, but to Lethbury's eye a mere dateless fragment of humanity projected against a background of conjecture. Over this anonymous particle of life Mrs. Lethbury leaned, such ecstasy reflected in her face as strikes up, in Correggio's Night-piece, from the child's body to the mother's countenance. It was a light that irradiated and dazzled her. She looked up at an enquiry of Lethbury's, but as their glances met he perceived that she no longer saw him, that he had become as invisible to her as she had long been to him. He had to transfer his question to the nurse.

"What is the child's name?" he asked.

"We call her Jane," said the nurse.

Lethbury, at first, had resisted the idea of a legal adoption; but when he found that his wife could not be brought to regard the child as hers till it had been made so by process of law, he promptly withdrew his objection. On one point only he remained inflexible; and that was the changing of the waif's name. Mrs. Lethbury, almost at once, had expressed a wish to rechristen it: she fluctuated between Muriel and Gladys, deferring the moment of decision like a lady wavering between two bonnets. But Lethbury was unyielding. In the general surrender of his prejudices this one alone held out.

"But Jane is so dreadful," Mrs. Lethbury protested.

"Well, we don't know that *she* won't be dreadful. She may grow up a Jane."

His wife exclaimed reproachfully. "The nurse says she's the loveliest—"

"Don't they always say that?" asked Lethbury patiently. He was prepared to be inexhaustibly patient now that he had reached a firm foothold of opposition.

"It's cruel to call her Jane," Mrs. Lethbury pleaded.

"It's ridiculous to call her Muriel."

"The nurse is *sure* she must be a lady's child."

Lethbury winced: he had tried, all along, to keep his mind off the question of antecedents.

"Well, let her prove it," he said, with a rising sense of exasperation. He wondered how he could ever have allowed himself to be drawn into such a ridiculous business; for the first time he felt the full irony of it. He had visions of coming home in the afternoon to a house smelling of linseed and paregoric, and of being greeted by a chronic howl as he went up stairs to dress for dinner. He had never been a club-man, but he saw himself becoming one now.

The worst of his anticipations were unfulfilled. The baby was surprisingly well and surprisingly quiet. Such infantile remedies as she absorbed were not potent enough to be perceived beyond the

nursery; and when Lethbury could be induced to enter that sanctuary, there was nothing to jar his nerves in the mild pink presence of his adopted daughter. Jars there were, indeed: they were probably inevitable in the disturbed routine of the household; but they occurred between Mrs. Lethbury and the nurses, and Jane contributed to them only a placid stare which might have served as a rebuke to the combatants.

In the reaction from his first impulse of atonement, Lethbury noted with sharpened perceptions the effect of the change on his wife's character. He saw already the error of supposing that it could work any transformation in her. It simply magnified her existing qualities. She was like a dried sponge put in water: she expanded, but she did not change her shape. From the stand-point of scientific observation it was curious to see how her stored instincts responded to the pseudo-maternal call. She overflowed with the petty maxims of the occasion. One felt in her the epitome, the consummation, of centuries of animal maternity, so that this little woman, who screamed at a mouse and was nervous about burglars, came to typify the cave-mother rending her prey for her young.

It was less easy to regard philosophically the practical effects of her borrowed motherhood. Lethbury found with surprise that she was becoming assertive and definite. She no longer represented the negative side of his life; she showed, indeed, a tendency to inconvenient affirmations. She had gradually expanded her assumption of motherhood till it included his own share in the relation, and he suddenly found himself regarded as the father of Jane. This was a contingency he had not foreseen, and it took all his philosophy to accept it; but there were moments of compensation. For Mrs. Lethbury was undoubtedly happy for the first time in years; and the thought that he had tardily contributed to this end reconciled him to the irony of the means.

At first he was inclined to reproach himself for still viewing the situation from the outside, for remaining a spectator instead of a

participant. He had been allured, for a moment, by the vision of severed hands meeting over a cradle, as the whole body of domestic fiction bears witness to their doing; and the fact that no such conjunction took place he could explain only on the ground that it was a borrowed cradle. He did not dislike the little girl. She still remained to him a hypothetical presence, a query rather than a fact; but her nearness was not unpleasant, and there were moments when her tentative utterances, her groping steps, seemed to loosen the dry accretions enveloping his inner self. But even at such moments—moments which he invited and caressed—she did not bring him nearer to his wife. He now perceived that he had made a certain place in his life for Mrs. Lethbury, and that she no longer fitted into it. It was too late to enlarge the space, and so she overflowed and encroached. Lethbury struggled against the sense of submergence. He let down barrier after barrier, yielding privacy after privacy; but his wife's personality continued to dilate. She was no longer herself alone: she was herself and Jane. Gradually, in a monstrous fusion of identity, she became herself, himself and Jane; and instead of trying to adapt her to a spare crevice of his character, he found himself carelessly squeezed into the smallest compartment of the domestic economy.

IV

He continued to tell himself that he was satisfied if his wife was happy; and it was not till the child's tenth year that he felt a doubt of her happiness.

Jane had been a preternaturally good child. During the eight years of her adoption she had caused her foster-parents no anxiety beyond those connected with the usual succession of youthful diseases. But her unknown progenitors had given her a robust constitution, and she passed unperturbed through measles, chicken-pox and whooping-cough. If there was any suffering it was endured vicariously by Mrs. Lethbury, whose temperature rose and fell with the patient's, and

who could not hear Jane sneeze without visions of a marble angel weeping over a broken column. But though Jane's prompt recoveries continued to belie such premonitions, though her existence continued to move forward on an even keel of good health and good conduct, Mrs. Lethbury's satisfaction showed no corresponding advance. Lethbury, at first, was disposed to add her disappointment to the long list of feminine inconsistencies with which the sententious observer of life builds up his favourable induction; but circumstances presently led him to take a kindlier view of the case.

Hitherto his wife had regarded him as a negligible factor in Jane's evolution. Beyond providing for his adopted daughter, and effacing himself before her, he was not expected to contribute to her well-being. But as time passed he appeared to his wife in a new light. It was he who was to educate Jane. In matters of the intellect, Mrs. Lethbury was the first to declare her deficiencies—to proclaim them, even, with a certain virtuous superiority. She said she did not pretend to be clever, and there was no denying the truth of the assertion. Now, however, she seemed less ready, not to own her limitations, but to glory in them. Confronted with the problem of Jane's instruction she stood in awe of the child.

"I have always been stupid, you know," she said to Lethbury with a new humility, "and I'm afraid I sha'n't know what is best for Jane. I'm sure she has a wonderfully good mind, and I should reproach myself if I didn't give her every opportunity." She looked at him helplessly. "You must tell me what ought to be done."

Lethbury was not unwilling to oblige her. Somewhere in his mental lumber-room there rusted a theory of education such as usually lingers among the impedimenta of the childless. He brought this out, refurbished it, and applied it to Jane. At first he thought his wife had not overrated the quality of the child's mind. Jane seemed extraordinarily intelligent. Her precocious definiteness of mind was encouraging to her inexperienced preceptor. She had no difficulty in fixing her attention, and he felt that every fact he imparted was

being etched in metal. He helped his wife to engage the best teachers, and for a while continued to take an ex-official interest in his adopted daughter's studies. But gradually his interest waned. Jane's ideas did not increase with her acquisitions. Her young mind remained a mere receptacle for facts: a kind of cold-storage from which anything which had been put there could be taken out at a moment's notice, intact but congealed. She developed, moreover, an inordinate pride in the capacity of her mental storehouse, and a tendency to pelt her public with its contents. She was overheard to jeer at her nurse for not knowing when the Saxon Heptarchy had fallen, and she alternately dazzled and depressed Mrs. Lethbury by the wealth of her chronological allusions. She showed no interest in the significance of the facts she amassed: she simply collected dates as another child might have collected stamps or marbles. To her foster-mother she seemed a prodigy of wisdom; but Lethbury saw, with a secret movement of sympathy, how the aptitudes in which Mrs. Lethbury gloried were slowly estranging her from her child.

"She is getting too clever for me," his wife said to him, after one of Jane's historical flights, "but I am so glad that she will be a companion to you."

Lethbury groaned in spirit. He did not look forward to Jane's companionship. She was still a good little girl: but there was something automatic and formal in her goodness, as though it were a kind of moral calisthenics which she went through for the sake of showing her agility. An early consciousness of virtue had moreover constituted her the natural guardian and adviser of her elders. Before she was fifteen she had set about reforming the household. She took Mrs. Lethbury in hand first; then she extended her efforts to the servants, with consequences more disastrous to the domestic harmony; and lastly she applied herself to Lethbury. She proved to him by statistics that he smoked too much, and that it was injurious to the optic nerve to read in bed. She took him to task for not going to church more regularly, and pointed out to him the evils of

desultory reading. She suggested that a regular course of study encourages mental concentration, and hinted that inconsecutiveness of thought is a sign of approaching age.

To her adopted mother her suggestions were equally pertinent. She instructed Mrs. Lethbury in an improved way of making beef stock, and called her attention to the unhygienic qualities of carpets. She poured out distracting facts about bacilli and vegetable mould, and demonstrated that curtains and picture-frames are a hot-bed of animal organisms. She learned by heart the nutritive ingredients of the principal articles of diet, and revolutionised the cuisine by an attempt to establish a scientific average between starch and phosphates. Four cooks left during this experiment, and Lethbury fell into the habit of dining at his club.

Once or twice, at the outset, he had tried to check Jane's ardour; but his efforts resulted only in hurting his wife's feelings. Jane remained impervious, and Mrs. Lethbury resented any attempt to protect her from her daughter. Lethbury saw that she was consoled for the sense of her own inferiority by the thought of what Jane's intellectual companionship must be to him; and he tried to keep up the illusion by enduring with what grace he might the blighting edification of Jane's discourse.

V

As Jane grew up he sometimes avenged himself by wondering if his wife was still sorry that they had not called her Muriel. Jane was not ugly; she developed, indeed, a kind of categorical prettiness which might have been a projection of her mind. She had a creditable collection of features, but one had to take an inventory of them to find out that she was good-looking. The fusing grace had been omitted.

Mrs. Lethbury took a touching pride in her daughter's first steps in the world. She expected Jane to take by her complexion those whom she did not capture by her learning. But Jane's rosy freshness did not

work any perceptible ravages. Whether the young men guessed the axioms on her lips and detected the encyclopædia in her eye, or whether they simply found no intrinsic interest in these features, certain it is, that, in spite of her mother's heroic efforts, and of incessant calls on Lethbury's purse, Jane, at the end of her first season, had dropped hopelessly out of the running. A few duller girls found her interesting, and one or two young men came to the house with the object of meeting other young women; but she was rapidly becoming one of the social supernumeraries who are asked out only because they are on people's lists.

The blow was bitter to Mrs. Lethbury; but she consoled herself with the idea that Jane had failed because she was too clever. Jane probably shared this conviction; at all events she betrayed no consciousness of failure. She had developed a pronounced taste for society, and went out, unweariedly and obstinately, winter after winter, while Mrs. Lethbury toiled in her wake, showering attentions on oblivious hostesses. To Lethbury there was something at once tragic and exasperating in the sight of their two figures, the one conciliatory, the other dogged, both pursuing with unabated zeal the elusive prize of popularity. He even began to feel a personal stake in the pursuit, not as it concerned Jane but as it affected his wife. He saw that the latter was the victim of Jane's disappointment: that Jane was not above the crude satisfaction of "taking it out" of her mother. Experience checked the impulse to come to his wife's defence; and when his resentment was at its height, Jane disarmed him by giving up the struggle.

Nothing was said to mark her capitulation; but Lethbury noticed that the visiting ceased and that the dressmaker's bills diminished. At the same time Mrs. Lethbury made it known that Jane had taken up charities; and before long Jane's conversation confirmed this announcement. At first Lethbury congratulated himself on the change; but Jane's domesticity soon began to weigh on him. During the day she was sometimes absent on errands of mercy; but in the

evening she was always there. At first she and Mrs. Lethbury sat in the drawing-room together, and Lethbury smoked in the library; but presently Jane formed the habit of joining him there, and he began to suspect that he was included among the objects of her philanthropy.

Mrs. Lethbury confirmed the suspicion. "Jane has grown very serious-minded lately," she said. "She imagines that she used to neglect you and she is trying to make up for it. Don't discourage her," she added innocently.

Such a plea delivered Lethbury helpless to his daughter's ministrations; and he found himself measuring the hours he spent with her by the amount of relief they must be affording her mother. There were even moments when he read a furtive gratitude in Mrs. Lethbury's eye.

But Lethbury was no hero, and he had nearly reached the limit of vicarious endurance when something wonderful happened. They never quite knew afterward how it had come about, or who first perceived it; but Mrs. Lethbury one day gave tremulous voice to their discovery.

"Of course," she said, "he comes here because of Elise." The young lady in question, a friend of Jane's, was possessed of attractions which had already been found to explain the presence of masculine visitors.

Lethbury risked a denial. "I don't think he does," he declared.

"But Elise is thought very pretty," Mrs. Lethbury insisted.

"I can't help that," said Lethbury doggedly.

He saw a faint light in his wife's eyes; but she remarked carelessly: "Mr. Budd would be a very good match for Elise."

Lethbury could hardly repress a chuckle: he was so exquisitely aware that she was trying to propitiate the gods.

For a few weeks neither said a word; then Mrs. Lethbury once more reverted to the subject.

"It is a month since Elise went abroad," she said.

“Is it?”

“And Mr. Budd seems to come here just as often—”

“Ah,” said Lethbury with heroic indifference; and his wife hastily changed the subject.

Mr. Winstanley Budd was a young man who suffered from an excess of manner. Politeness gushed from him in the driest seasons. He was always performing feats of drawing-room chivalry, and the approach of the most unobtrusive female threw him into attitudes which endangered the furniture. His features, being of the cherubic order, did not lend themselves to this rôle; but there were moments when he appeared to dominate them, to force them into compliance with an aquiline ideal. The range of Mr. Budd’s social benevolence made its object hard to distinguish. He spread his cloak so indiscriminately that one could not always interpret the gesture, and Jane’s impassive manner had the effect of increasing his demonstrations: she threw him into paroxysms of politeness.

At first he filled the house with his amenities; but gradually it became apparent that his most dazzling effects were directed exclusively to Jane. Lethbury and his wife held their breath and looked away from each other. They pretended not to notice the frequency of Mr. Budd’s visits, they struggled against an imprudent inclination to leave the young people too much alone. Their conclusions were the result of indirect observation, for neither of them dared to be caught watching Mr. Budd: they behaved like naturalists on the trail of a rare butterfly.

In his efforts not to notice Mr. Budd, Lethbury centred his attentions on Jane; and Jane, at this crucial moment, wrung from him a reluctant admiration. While her parents went about dissembling their emotions, she seemed to have none to conceal. She betrayed neither eagerness nor surprise; so complete was her unconcern that there were moments when Lethbury feared it was obtuseness, when he could hardly help whispering to her that now was the moment to lower the net.

Meanwhile the velocity of Mr. Budd's gyrations increased with the ardour of courtship; his politeness became incandescent, and Jane found herself the centre of a pyrotechnical display culminating in the "set piece" of an offer of marriage.

Mrs. Lethbury imparted the news to her husband one evening after their daughter had gone to bed. The announcement was made and received with an air of detachment, as though both feared to be betrayed into unseemly exultation; but Lethbury, as his wife ended, could not repress the inquiry, "Have they decided on a day?"

Mrs. Lethbury's superior command of her features enabled her to look shocked. "What can you be thinking of? He only offered himself at five!"

"Of course—of course—" stammered Lethbury—"but nowadays people marry after such short engagements—"

"Engagement!" said his wife solemnly. "There is no engagement."

Lethbury dropped his cigar. "What on earth do you mean?"

"Jane is thinking it over."

"Thinking it over?"

"She has asked for a month before deciding."

Lethbury sank back with a gasp. Was it genius or was it madness? He felt incompetent to decide; and Mrs. Lethbury's next words showed that she shared his difficulty.

"Of course I don't want to hurry Jane—"

"Of course not," he acquiesced.

"But I pointed out to her that a young man of Mr. Budd's impulsive temperament might—might be easily discouraged—"

"Yes; and what did she say?"

"She said that if she was worth winning she was worth waiting for."

VI

The period of Mr. Budd's probation could scarcely have cost him as much mental anguish as it caused his would-be parents-in-law.

Mrs. Lethbury, by various ruses, tried to shorten the ordeal, but Jane remained inexorable; and each morning Lethbury came down to breakfast with the certainty of finding a letter of withdrawal from her discouraged suitor.

When at length the decisive day came, and Mrs. Lethbury, at its close, stole into the library with an air of chastened joy, they stood for a moment without speaking; then Mrs. Lethbury paid a fitting tribute to the proprieties by faltering out: "It will be dreadful to have to give her up—"

Lethbury could not repress a warning gesture; but even as it escaped him he realised that his wife's grief was genuine.

"Of course, of course," he said, vainly sounding his own emotional shallows for an answering regret. And yet it was his wife who had suffered most from Jane!

He had fancied that these sufferings would be effaced by the milder atmosphere of their last weeks together; but felicity did not soften Jane. Not for a moment did she relax her dominion: she simply widened it to include a new subject. Mr. Budd found himself under orders with the others; and a new fear assailed Lethbury as he saw Jane assume prenuptial control of her betrothed. Lethbury had never felt any strong personal interest in Mr. Budd; but as Jane's prospective husband the young man excited his sympathy. To his surprise he found that Mrs. Lethbury shared the feeling.

"I'm afraid he may find Jane a little exacting," she said, after an evening dedicated to a stormy discussion of the wedding arrangements. "She really ought to make some concessions. If he *wants* to be married in a black frock-coat instead of a dark gray one—" She paused and looked doubtfully at Lethbury.

"What can I do about it?" he said.

"You might explain to him—tell him that Jane isn't always—"

Lethbury made an impatient gesture. "What are you afraid of? His finding her out or his not finding her out?"

Mrs. Lethbury flushed. "You put it so dreadfully!"

Her husband mused for a moment; then he said with an air of cheerful hypocrisy: "After all, Budd is old enough to take care of himself."

But the next day Mrs. Lethbury surprised him. Late in the afternoon she entered the library, so breathless and inarticulate that he scented a catastrophe.

"I've done it!" she cried.

"Done what?"

"Told him." She nodded toward the door. "He's just gone. Jane is out, and I had a chance to talk to him alone."

Lethbury pushed a chair forward and she sank into it.

"What did you tell him? That she is *not* always—"

Mrs. Lethbury lifted a tragic eye. "No; I told him that she always is —"

"Always is—?"

"Yes."

There was a pause. Lethbury made a call on his hoarded philosophy. He saw Jane suddenly reinstated in her evening seat by the library fire; but an answering chord in him thrilled at his wife's heroism.

"Well—what did he say?"

Mrs. Lethbury's agitation deepened. It was clear that the blow had fallen.

"He . . . he said . . . that we . . . had never understood Jane . . . or appreciated her . . ." The final syllables were lost in her handkerchief, and she left him marvelling at the mechanism of woman.

After that, Lethbury faced the future with an undaunted eye. They had done their duty—at least his wife had done hers—and they were reaping the usual harvest of ingratitude with a zest seldom accorded to such reaping. There was a marked change in Mr. Budd's manner, and his increasing coldness sent a genial glow through Lethbury's system. It was easy to bear with Jane in the light of Mr. Budd's

disapproval.

There was a good deal to be borne in the last days, and the brunt of it fell on Mrs. Lethbury. Jane marked her transition to the married state by a seasonable but incongruous display of nerves. She became sentimental, hysterical and reluctant. She quarrelled with her betrothed and threatened to return the ring. Mrs. Lethbury had to intervene, and Lethbury felt the hovering sword of destiny. But the blow was suspended. Mr. Budd's chivalry was proof against all his bride's caprices and his devotion throve on her cruelty. Lethbury feared that he was too faithful, too enduring, and longed to urge him to vary his tactics. Jane presently reappeared with the ring on her finger, and consented to try on the wedding-dress; but her uncertainties, her reactions, were prolonged till the final day.

When it dawned, Lethbury was still in an ecstasy of apprehension. Feeling reasonably sure of the principal actors he had centred his fears on incidental possibilities. The clergyman might have a stroke, or the church might burn down, or there might be something wrong with the license. He did all that was humanly possible to avert such contingencies, but there remained that incalculable factor known as the hand of God. Lethbury seemed to feel it groping for him.

At the altar it almost had him by the nape. Mr. Budd was late; and for five immeasurable minutes Lethbury and Jane faced a churchful of conjecture. Then the bridegroom appeared, flushed but chivalrous, and explaining to his father-in-law under cover of the ritual that he had torn his glove and had to go back for another.

"You'll be losing the ring next," muttered Lethbury; but Mr. Budd produced this article punctually, and a moment or two later was bearing its wearer captive down the aisle.

At the wedding-breakfast Lethbury caught his wife's eye fixed on him in mild disapproval, and understood that his hilarity was exceeding the bounds of fitness. He pulled himself together and tried to subdue his tone; but his jubilation bubbled over like a champagne-glass perpetually refilled. The deeper his draughts the higher it rose.

It was at the brim when, in the wake of the dispersing guests, Jane came down in her travelling-dress and fell on her mother's neck.

"I can't leave you!" she wailed, and Lethbury felt as suddenly sobered as a man under a douche. But if the bride was reluctant her captor was relentless. Never had Mr. Budd been more dominant, more aquiline. Lethbury's last fears were dissipated as the young man snatched Jane from her mother's bosom and bore her off to the brougham.

The brougham rolled away, the last milliner's girl forsook her post by the awning, the red carpet was folded up, and the house door closed. Lethbury stood alone in the hall with his wife. As he turned toward her, he noticed the look of tired heroism in her eyes, the deepened lines of her face. They reflected his own symptoms too accurately not to appeal to him. The nervous tension had been horrible. He went up to her, and an answering impulse made her lay a hand on his arm. He held it there a moment.

"Let us go off and have a jolly little dinner at a restaurant," he proposed.

There had been a time when such a suggestion would have surprised her to the verge of disapproval; but now she agreed to it at once.

"Oh, that would be so nice," she murmured with a great sigh of relief and assuagement.

Jane had fulfilled her mission after all: she had drawn them together at last.

The Other Two

WAYTHORN, on the drawing-room hearth, waited for his wife to come down to dinner.

It was their first night under his own roof, and he was surprised at his thrill of boyish agitation. He was not so old, to be sure—his glass gave him little more than the five-and-thirty years to which his wife confessed—but he had fancied himself already in the temperate zone; yet here he was listening for her step with a tender sense of all it symbolised, with some old trail of verse about the garlanded nuptial door-posts floating through his enjoyment of the pleasant room and the good dinner just beyond it.

They had been hastily recalled from their honeymoon by the illness of Lily Haskett, the child of Mrs. Waythorn's first marriage. The little girl, at Waythorn's desire, had been transferred to his house on the day of her mother's wedding, and the doctor, on their arrival, broke the news that she was ill with typhoid, but declared that all the symptoms were favourable. Lily could show twelve years of unblemished health, and the case promised to be a light one. The nurse spoke as reassuringly, and after a moment of alarm Mrs. Waythorn had adjusted herself to the situation. She was very fond of Lily—her affection for the child had perhaps been her decisive charm in Waythorn's eyes—but she had the perfectly balanced nerves which her little girl had inherited, and no woman ever wasted less tissue in unproductive worry. Waythorn was therefore quite prepared to see her come in presently, a little late because of a last look at Lily, but as serene and well-appointed as if her good-night kiss had been laid

on the brow of health. Her composure was restful to him; it acted as ballast to his somewhat unstable sensibilities. As he pictured her bending over the child's bed he thought how soothing her presence must be in illness: her very step would prognosticate recovery.

His own life had been a gray one, from temperament rather than circumstance, and he had been drawn to her by the unperturbed gaiety which kept her fresh and elastic at an age when most women's activities are growing either slack or febrile. He knew what was said about her; for, popular as she was, there had always been a faint undercurrent of detraction. When she had appeared in New York, nine or ten years earlier, as the pretty Mrs. Haskett whom Gus Varick had unearthed somewhere—was it in Pittsburg or Utica?—society, while promptly accepting her, had reserved the right to cast a doubt on its own indiscrimination. Enquiry, however, established her undoubted connection with a socially reigning family, and explained her recent divorce as the natural result of a runaway match at seventeen; and as nothing was known of Mr. Haskett it was easy to believe the worst of him.

Alice Haskett's remarriage with Gus Varick was a passport to the set whose recognition she coveted, and for a few years the Varicks were the most popular couple in town. Unfortunately the alliance was brief and stormy, and this time the husband had his champions. Still, even Varick's stanchest supporters admitted that he was not meant for matrimony, and Mrs. Varick's grievances were of a nature to bear the inspection of the New York courts. A New York divorce is in itself a diploma of virtue, and in the semi-widowhood of this second separation Mrs. Varick took on an air of sanctity, and was allowed to confide her wrongs to some of the most scrupulous ears in town. But when it was known that she was to marry Waythorn there was a momentary reaction. Her best friends would have preferred to see her remain in the rôle of the injured wife, which was as becoming to her as crape to a rosy complexion. True, a decent time had elapsed, and it was not even suggested that Waythorn had

supplanted his predecessor. People shook their heads over him, however, and one grudging friend, to whom he affirmed that he took the step with his eyes open, replied oracularly: "Yes—and with your ears shut."

Waythorn could afford to smile at these innuendoes. In the Wall Street phrase, he had "discounted" them. He knew that society has not yet adapted itself to the consequences of divorce, and that till the adaptation takes place every woman who uses the freedom the law accords her must be her own social justification. Waythorn had an amused confidence in his wife's ability to justify herself. His expectations were fulfilled, and before the wedding took place Alice Varick's group had rallied openly to her support. She took it all imperturbably: she had a way of surmounting obstacles without seeming to be aware of them, and Waythorn looked back with wonder at the trivialities over which he had worn his nerves thin. He had the sense of having found refuge in a richer, warmer nature than his own, and his satisfaction, at the moment, was humourously summed up in the thought that his wife, when she had done all she could for Lily, would not be ashamed to come down and enjoy a good dinner.

The anticipation of such enjoyment was not, however, the sentiment expressed by Mrs. Waythorn's charming face when she presently joined him. Though she had put on her most engaging teagown she had neglected to assume the smile that went with it, and Waythorn thought he had never seen her look so nearly worried.

"What is it?" he asked. "Is anything wrong with Lily?"

"No; I've just been in and she's still sleeping." Mrs. Waythorn hesitated. "But something tiresome has happened."

He had taken her two hands, and now perceived that he was crushing a paper between them.

"This letter?"

"Yes—Mr. Haskett has written—I mean his lawyer has written."

Waythorn felt himself flush uncomfortably. He dropped his wife's

hands.

“What about?”

“About seeing Lily. You know the courts—”

“Yes, yes,” he interrupted nervously.

Nothing was known about Haskett in New York. He was vaguely supposed to have remained in the outer darkness from which his wife had been rescued, and Waythorn was one of the few who were aware that he had given up his business in Utica and followed her to New York in order to be near his little girl. In the days of his wooing, Waythorn had often met Lily on the doorstep, rosy and smiling, on her way “to see papa.”

“I am so sorry,” Mrs. Waythorn murmured.

He roused himself. “What does he want?”

“He wants to see her. You know she goes to him once a week.”

“Well—he doesn’t expect her to go to him now, does he?”

“No—he has heard of her illness; but he expects to come here.”

“Here?”

Mrs. Waythorn reddened under his gaze. They looked away from each other.

“I’m afraid he has the right. . . . You’ll see. . . .” She made a proffer of the letter.

Waythorn moved away with a gesture of refusal. He stood staring about the softly lighted room, which a moment before had seemed so full of bridal intimacy.

“I’m so sorry,” she repeated. “If Lily could have been moved—”

“That’s out of the question,” he returned impatiently.

“I suppose so.”

Her lip was beginning to tremble, and he felt himself a brute.

“He must come, of course,” he said. “When is—his day?”

“I’m afraid—to-morrow.”

“Very well. Send a note in the morning.”

The butler entered to announce dinner.

Waythorn turned to his wife. “Come—you must be tired. It’s

beastly, but try to forget about it," he said, drawing her hand through his arm.

"You're so good, dear. I'll try," she whispered back.

Her face cleared at once, and as she looked at him across the flowers, between the rosy candle-shades, he saw her lips waver back into a smile.

"How pretty everything is!" she sighed luxuriously.

He turned to the butler. "The champagne at once, please. Mrs. Waythorn is tired."

In a moment or two their eyes met above the sparkling glasses. Her own were quite clear and untroubled: he saw that she had obeyed his injunction and forgotten.

II

Waythorn, the next morning, went down town earlier than usual. Haskett was not likely to come till the afternoon, but the instinct of flight drove him forth. He meant to stay away all day—he had thoughts of dining at his club. As his door closed behind him he reflected that before he opened it again it would have admitted another man who had as much right to enter it as himself, and the thought filled him with a physical repugnance.

He caught the "elevated" at the employés' hour, and found himself crushed between two layers of pendulous humanity. At Eighth Street the man facing him wriggled out, and another took his place. Waythorn glanced up and saw that it was Gus Varick. The men were so close together that it was impossible to ignore the smile of recognition on Varick's handsome overblown face. And after all—why not? They had always been on good terms, and Varick had been divorced before Waythorn's attentions to his wife began. The two exchanged a word on the perennial grievance of the congested trains, and when a seat at their side was miraculously left empty the instinct of self-preservation made Waythorn slip into it after Varick.

The latter drew the stout man's breath of relief. "Lord—I was

beginning to feel like a pressed flower.” He leaned back, looking unconcernedly at Waythorn. “Sorry to hear that Sellers is knocked out again.”

“Sellers?” echoed Waythorn, starting at his partner’s name.

Varick looked surprised. “You didn’t know he was laid up with the gout?”

“No. I’ve been away—I only got back last night.” Waythorn felt himself reddening in anticipation of the other’s smile.

“Ah—yes; to be sure. And Sellers’s attack came on two days ago. I’m afraid he’s pretty bad. Very awkward for me, as it happens, because he was just putting through a rather important thing for me.”

“Ah?” Waythorn wondered vaguely since when Varick had been dealing in “important things.” Hitherto he had dabbled only in the shallow pools of speculation, with which Waythorn’s office did not usually concern itself.

It occurred to him that Varick might be talking at random, to relieve the strain of their propinquity. That strain was becoming momentarily more apparent to Waythorn, and when, at Cortlandt Street, he caught sight of an acquaintance and had a sudden vision of the picture he and Varick must present to an initiated eye, he jumped up with a muttered excuse.

“I hope you’ll find Sellers better,” said Varick civilly, and he stammered back: “If I can be of any use to you—” and let the departing crowd sweep him to the platform.

At his office he heard that Sellers was in fact ill with the gout, and would probably not be able to leave the house for some weeks.

“I’m sorry it should have happened so, Mr. Waythorn,” the senior clerk said with affable significance. “Mr. Sellers was very much upset at the idea of giving you such a lot of extra work just now.”

“Oh, that’s no matter,” said Waythorn hastily. He secretly welcomed the pressure of additional business, and was glad to think that, when the day’s work was over, he would have to call at his

partner's on the way home.

He was late for luncheon, and turned in at the nearest restaurant instead of going to his club. The place was full, and the waiter hurried him to the back of the room to capture the only vacant table. In the cloud of cigar-smoke Waythorn did not at once distinguish his neighbours; but presently, looking about him, he saw Varick seated a few feet off. This time, luckily, they were too far apart for conversation, and Varick, who faced another way, had probably not even seen him; but there was an irony in their renewed nearness.

Varick was said to be fond of good living, and as Waythorn sat despatching his hurried luncheon he looked across half enviously at the other's leisurely degustation of his meal. When Waythorn first saw him he had been helping himself with critical deliberation to a bit of Camembert at the ideal point of liquefaction, and now, the cheese removed, he was just pouring his *café double* from its little two-storied earthen pot. He poured slowly, his ruddy profile bent above the task, and one beringed white hand steadying the lid of the coffee-pot; then he stretched his other hand to the decanter of cognac at his elbow, filled a liqueur-glass, took a tentative sip, and poured the brandy into his coffee-cup.

Waythorn watched him in a kind of fascination. What was he thinking of—only of the flavour of the coffee and the liqueur? Had the morning's meeting left no more trace in his thoughts than on his face? Had his wife so completely passed out of his life that even this odd encounter with her present husband, within a week after her remarriage, was no more than an incident in his day? And as Waythorn mused, another idea struck him: had Haskett ever met Varick as Varick and he had just met? The recollection of Haskett perturbed him, and he rose and left the restaurant, taking a circuitous way out to escape the placid irony of Varick's nod.

It was after seven when Waythorn reached home. He thought the footman who opened the door looked at him oddly.

"How is Miss Lily?" he asked in haste.

“Doing very well, sir. A gentleman—”

“Tell Barlow to put off dinner for half an hour,” Waythorn cut him off, hurrying upstairs.

He went straight to his room and dressed without seeing his wife. When he reached the drawing-room she was there, fresh and radiant. Lily’s day had been good; the doctor was not coming back that evening.

At dinner Waythorn told her of Sellers’s illness and of the resulting complications. She listened sympathetically, adjuring him not to let himself be overworked, and asking vague feminine questions about the routine of the office. Then she gave him the chronicle of Lily’s day; quoted the nurse and doctor, and told him who had called to inquire. He had never seen her more serene and unruffled. It struck him, with a curious pang, that she was very happy in being with him, so happy that she found a childish pleasure in rehearsing the trivial incidents of her day.

After dinner they went to the library, and the servant put the coffee and liqueurs on a low table before her and left the room. She looked singularly soft and girlish in her rosy pale dress, against the dark leather of one of his bachelor armchairs. A day earlier the contrast would have charmed him.

He turned away now, choosing a cigar with affected deliberation.

“Did Haskett come?” he asked, with his back to her. “Oh, yes—he came.”

“You didn’t see him, of course?”

She hesitated a moment. “I let the nurse see him.”

That was all. There was nothing more to ask. He swung round toward her, applying a match to his cigar. Well, the thing was over for a week, at any rate. He would try not to think of it. She looked up at him, a trifle rosier than usual, with a smile in her eyes.

“Ready for your coffee, dear?”

He leaned against the mantelpiece, watching her as she lifted the coffee-pot. The lamplight struck a gleam from her bracelets and

tipped her soft hair with brightness. How light and slender she was, and how each gesture flowed into the next! She seemed a creature all compact of harmonies. As the thought of Haskett receded, Waythorn felt himself yielding again to the joy of possessorship. They were his, those white hands with their flitting motions, his the light haze of hair, the lips and eyes. . . .

She set down the coffee-pot, and reaching for the decanter of cognac, measured off a liqueur-glass and poured it into his cup.

Waythorn uttered a sudden exclamation.

"What is the matter?" she said, startled.

"Nothing; only—I don't take cognac in my coffee."

"Oh, how stupid of me," she cried.

Their eyes met, and she blushed a sudden agonised red.

III

Ten days later, Mr. Sellers, still house-bound, asked Waythorn to call on his way down town.

The senior partner, with his swaddled foot propped up by the fire, greeted his associate with an air of embarrassment.

"I'm sorry, my dear fellow; I've got to ask you to do an awkward thing for me."

Waythorn waited, and the other went on, after a pause apparently given to the arrangement of his phrases: "The fact is, when I was knocked out I had just gone into a rather complicated piece of business for—Gus Varick."

"Well?" said Waythorn, with an attempt to put him at his ease.

"Well—it's this way: Varick came to me the day before my attack. He had evidently had an inside tip from somebody, and had made about a hundred thousand. He came to me for advice, and I suggested his going in with Vanderlyn."

"Oh, the deuce!" Waythorn exclaimed. He saw in a flash what had happened. The investment was an alluring one, but required negotiation. He listened quietly while Sellers put the case before him,

and, the statement ended, he said: "You think I ought to see Varick?"

"I'm afraid I can't as yet. The doctor is obdurate. And this thing can't wait. I hate to ask you, but no one else in the office knows the ins and outs of it."

Waythorn stood silent. He did not care a farthing for the success of Varick's venture, but the honour of the office was to be considered, and he could hardly refuse to oblige his partner.

"Very well," he said, "I'll do it."

That afternoon, apprised by telephone, Varick called at the office. Waythorn, waiting in his private room, wondered what the others thought of it. The newspapers, at the time of Mrs. Waythorn's marriage, had acquainted their readers with every detail of her previous matrimonial ventures, and Waythorn could fancy the clerks smiling behind Varick's back as he was ushered in.

Varick bore himself admirably. He was easy without being undignified, and Waythorn was conscious of cutting a much less impressive figure. Varick had no experience of business, and the talk prolonged itself for nearly an hour while Waythorn set forth with scrupulous precision the details of the proposed transaction.

"I'm awfully obliged to you," Varick said as he rose. "The fact is I'm not used to having much money to look after, and I don't want to make an ass of myself—" He smiled, and Waythorn could not help noticing that there was something pleasant about his smile. "It feels uncommonly queer to have enough cash to pay one's bills. I'd have sold my soul for it a few years ago!"

Waythorn winced at the allusion. He had heard it rumoured that a lack of funds had been one of the determining causes of the Varick separation, but it did not occur to him that Varick's words were intentional. It seemed more likely that the desire to keep clear of embarrassing topics had fatally drawn him into one. Waythorn did not wish to be outdone in civility.

"We'll do the best we can for you," he said. "I think this is a good thing you're in."

“Oh, I’m sure it’s immense. It’s awfully good of you—” Varick broke off, embarrassed. “I suppose the thing’s settled now—but if—”

“If anything happens before Sellers is about, I’ll see you again,” said Waythorn quietly. He was glad, in the end, to appear the more self-possessed of the two.

The course of Lily’s illness ran smooth, and as the days passed Waythorn grew used to the idea of Haskett’s weekly visit. The first time the day came round, he stayed out late, and questioned his wife as to the visit on his return. She replied at once that Haskett had merely seen the nurse downstairs, as the doctor did not wish any one in the child’s sickroom till after the crisis.

The following week Waythorn was again conscious of the recurrence of the day, but had forgotten it by the time he came home to dinner. The crisis of the disease came a few days later, with a rapid decline of fever, and the little girl was pronounced out of danger. In the rejoicing which ensued the thought of Haskett passed out of Waythorn’s mind, and one afternoon, letting himself into the house with a latch-key, he went straight to his library without noticing a shabby hat and umbrella in the hall.

In the library he found a small effaced-looking man with a thinnish gray beard sitting on the edge of a chair. The stranger might have been a piano-tuner, or one of those mysteriously efficient persons who are summoned in emergencies to adjust some detail of the domestic machinery. He blinked at Waythorn through a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles and said mildly: “Mr. Waythorn, I presume? I am Lily’s father.”

Waythorn flushed. “Oh—” he stammered uncomfortably. He broke off, disliking to appear rude. Inwardly he was trying to adjust the actual Haskett to the image of him projected by his wife’s reminiscences. Waythorn had been allowed to infer that Alice’s first husband was a brute.

“I am sorry to intrude,” said Haskett, with his over-the-counter

politeness.

“Don’t mention it,” returned Waythorn, collecting himself. “I suppose the nurse has been told?”

“I presume so. I can wait,” said Haskett. He had a resigned way of speaking, as though life had worn down his natural powers of resistance.

Waythorn stood on the threshold, nervously pulling off his gloves.

“I’m sorry you’ve been detained. I will send for the nurse,” he said; and as he opened the door he added with an effort: “I’m glad we can give you a good report of Lily.” He winced as the door slipped out, but Haskett seemed not to notice it.

“Thank you, Mr. Waythorn. It’s been an anxious time for me.”

“Ah, well, that’s past. Soon she’ll be able to go to you.” Waythorn nodded and passed out.

In his own room he flung himself down with a groan. He hated the womanish sensibility which made him suffer so acutely from the grotesque chances of life. He had known when he married that his wife’s former husbands were both living, and that amid the multiplied contacts of modern existence there were a thousand chances to one that he would run against one or the other, yet he found himself as much disturbed by his brief encounter with Haskett as though the law had not obligingly removed all difficulties in the way of their meeting.

Waythorn sprang up and began to pace the room nervously. He had not suffered half as much from his two meetings with Varick. It was Haskett’s presence in his own house that made the situation so intolerable. He stood still, hearing steps in the passage.

“This way, please,” he heard the nurse say. Haskett was being taken upstairs, then: not a corner of the house but was open to him. Waythorn dropped into another chair, staring vaguely ahead of him. On his dressing-table stood a photograph of Alice, taken when he had first known her. She was Alice Varick then—how fine and exquisite he had thought her! Those were Varick’s pearls about her neck. At

Waythorn's instance they had been returned before her marriage. Had Haskett ever given her any trinkets—and what had become of them, Waythorn wondered? He realised suddenly that he knew very little of Haskett's past or present situation; but from the man's appearance and manner of speech he could reconstruct with curious precision the surroundings of Alice's first marriage. And it startled him to think that she had, in the background of her life, a phase of existence so different from anything with which he had connected her. Varick, whatever his faults, was a gentleman, in the conventional, traditional sense of the term: the sense which at that moment seemed, oddly enough, to have most meaning to Waythorn. He and Varick had the same social habits, spoke the same language, understood the same allusions. But this other man . . . it was grotesquely uppermost in Waythorn's mind that Haskett had worn a made-up tie attached with an elastic. Why should that ridiculous detail symbolise the whole man? Waythorn was exasperated by his own paltriness, but the fact of the tie expanded, forced itself on him, became as it were the key to Alice's past. He could see her, as Mrs. Haskett, sitting in a "front parlour" furnished in plush, with a pianola, and a copy of "Ben Hur" on the centre-table. He could see her going to the theatre with Haskett—or perhaps even to a "Church Sociable"—she in a "picture hat" and Haskett in a black frock-coat, a little creased, with the made-up tie on an elastic. On the way home they would stop and look at the illuminated shop-windows, lingering over the photographs of New York actresses. On Sunday afternoons Haskett would take her for a walk, pushing Lily ahead of them in a white enamelled perambulator, and Waythorn had a vision of the people they would stop and talk to. He could fancy how pretty Alice must have looked, in a dress adroitly constructed from the hints of a New York fashion-paper, and how she must have looked down on the other women, chafing at her life, and secretly feeling that she belonged in a bigger place.

For the moment his foremost thought was one of wonder at the

way in which she had shed the phase of existence which her marriage with Haskett implied. It was as if her whole aspect, every gesture, every inflection, every allusion, were a studied negation of that period of her life. If she had denied being married to Haskett she could hardly have stood more convicted of duplicity than in this obliteration of the self which had been his wife.

Waythorn started up, checking himself in the analysis of her motives. What right had he to create a fantastic effigy of her and then pass judgment on it? She had spoken vaguely of her first marriage as unhappy, had hinted, with becoming reticence, that Haskett had wrought havoc among her young illusions. . . . It was a pity for Waythorn's peace of mind that Haskett's very inoffensiveness shed a new light on the nature of those illusions. A man would rather think that his wife has been brutalised by her first husband than that the process has been reversed.

IV

"Mr. Waythorn, I don't like that French governess of Lily's."

Haskett, subdued and apologetic, stood before Waythorn in the library, revolving his shabby hat in his hand.

Waythorn, surprised in his armchair over the evening paper, stared back perplexedly at his visitor.

"You'll excuse my asking to see you," Haskett continued. "But this is my last visit, and I thought if I could have a word with you it would be a better way than writing to Mrs. Waythorn's lawyer."

Waythorn rose uneasily. He did not like the French governess either; but that was irrelevant.

"I am not so sure of that," he returned stiffly; "but since you wish it I will give your message to—my wife." He always hesitated over the possessive pronoun in addressing Haskett.

The latter sighed. "I don't know as that will help much. She didn't like it when I spoke to her."

Waythorn turned red. "When did you see her?" he asked.

“Not since the first day I came to see Lily—right after she was taken sick. I remarked to her then that I didn’t like the governess.”

Waythorn made no answer. He remembered distinctly that, after that first visit, he had asked his wife if she had seen Haskett. She had lied to him then, but she had respected his wishes since; and the incident cast a curious light on her character. He was sure she would not have seen Haskett that first day if she had divined that Waythorn would object, and the fact that she did not divine it was almost as disagreeable to the latter as the discovery that she had lied to him.

“I don’t like the woman,” Haskett was repeating with mild persistency. “She ain’t straight, Mr. Waythorn—she’ll teach the child to be underhand. I’ve noticed a change in Lily—she’s too anxious to please—and she don’t always tell the truth. She used to be the straightest child, Mr. Waythorn—” He broke off, his voice a little thick. “Not but what I want her to have a stylish education,” he ended.

Waythorn was touched. “I’m sorry, Mr. Haskett; but frankly, I don’t quite see what I can do.”

Haskett hesitated. Then he laid his hat on the table, and advanced to the hearth-rug, on which Waythorn was standing. There was nothing aggressive in his manner, but he had the solemnity of a timid man resolved on a decisive measure.

“There’s just one thing you can do, Mr. Waythorn,” he said. “You can remind Mrs. Waythorn that, by the decree of the courts, I am entitled to have a voice in Lily’s bringing up.” He paused, and went on more deprecatingly: “I’m not the kind to talk about enforcing my rights, Mr. Waythorn. I don’t know as I think a man is entitled to rights he hasn’t known how to hold on to; but this business of the child is different. I’ve never let go there—and I never mean to.”

The scene left Waythorn deeply shaken. Shamefacedly, in indirect ways, he had been finding out about Haskett; and all that he had learned was favourable. The little man, in order to be near his

daughter, had sold out his share in a profitable business in Utica, and accepted a modest clerkship in a New York manufacturing house. He boarded in a shabby street and had few acquaintances. His passion for Lily filled his life. Waythorn felt that this exploration of Haskett was like groping about with a dark-lantern in his wife's past; but he saw now that there were recesses his lantern had not explored. He had never enquired into the exact circumstances of his wife's first matrimonial rupture. On the surface all had been fair. It was she who had obtained the divorce, and the court had given her the child. But Waythorn knew how many ambiguities such a verdict might cover. The mere fact that Haskett retained a right over his daughter implied an unsuspected compromise. Waythorn was an idealist. He always refused to recognise unpleasant contingencies till he found himself confronted with them, and then he saw them followed by a spectral train of consequences. His next days were thus haunted, and he determined to try to lay the ghosts by conjuring them up in his wife's presence.

When he repeated Haskett's request a flame of anger passed over her face; but she subdued it instantly and spoke with a slight quiver of outraged motherhood.

"It is very ungentlemanly of him," she said.

The word grated on Waythorn. "That is neither here nor there. It's a bare question of rights."

She murmured: "It's not as if he could ever be a help to Lily—"

Waythorn flushed. This was even less to his taste. "The question is," he repeated, "what authority has he over her?"

She looked downward, twisting herself a little in her seat. "I am willing to see him—I thought you objected," she faltered.

In a flash he understood that she knew the extent of Haskett's claims. Perhaps it was not the first time she had resisted them.

"My objecting has nothing to do with it," he said coldly; "if Haskett has a right to be consulted you must consult him."

She burst into tears, and he saw that she expected him to regard

her as a victim.

Haskett did not abuse his rights. Waythorn had felt miserably sure that he would not. But the governess was dismissed, and from time to time the little man demanded an interview with Alice. After the first outburst she accepted the situation with her usual adaptability. Haskett had once reminded Waythorn of the piano-tuner, and Mrs. Waythorn, after a month or two, appeared to class him with that domestic familiar. Waythorn could not but respect the father's tenacity. At first he had tried to cultivate the suspicion that Haskett might be "up to" something, that he had an object in securing a foothold in the house. But in his heart Waythorn was sure of Haskett's single-mindedness; he even guessed in the latter a mild contempt for such advantages as his relation with the Waythorns might offer. Haskett's sincerity of purpose made him invulnerable, and his successor had to accept him as a lien on the property.

Mr. Sellers was sent to Europe to recover from his gout, and Varick's affairs hung on Waythorn's hands. The negotiations were prolonged and complicated; they necessitated frequent conferences between the two men, and the interests of the firm forbade Waythorn's suggesting that his client should transfer his business to another office.

Varick appeared well in the transaction. In moments of relaxation his coarse streak appeared, and Waythorn dreaded his geniality; but in the office he was concise and clear-headed, with a flattering deference to Waythorn's judgment. Their business relations being so affably established, it would have been absurd for the two men to ignore each other in society. The first time they met in a drawing-room, Varick took up their intercourse in the same easy key, and his hostess's grateful glance obliged Waythorn to respond to it. After that they ran across each other frequently, and one evening at a ball Waythorn, wandering through the remoter rooms, came upon Varick seated beside his wife. She coloured a little, and faltered in what she

was saying; but Varick nodded to Waythorn without rising, and the latter strolled on.

In the carriage, on the way home, he broke out nervously: "I didn't know you spoke to Varick."

Her voice trembled a little. "It's the first time—he happened to be standing near me; I didn't know what to do. It's so awkward, meeting everywhere—and he said you had been very kind about some business."

"That's different," said Waythorn.

She paused a moment. "I'll do just as you wish," she returned pliantly. "I thought it would be less awkward to speak to him when we meet."

Her pliancy was beginning to sicken him. Had she really no will of her own—no theory about her relationship to these men? She had accepted Haskett—did she mean to accept Varick? It was "less awkward," as she had said, and her instinct was to evade difficulties or to circumvent them. With sudden vividness Waythorn saw how the instinct had developed. She was "as easy as an old shoe"—a shoe that too many feet had worn. Her elasticity was the result of tension in too many different directions. Alice Haskett—Alice Varick—Alice Waythorn—she had been each in turn, and had left hanging to each name a little of her privacy, a little of her personality, a little of the inmost self where the unknown god abides.

"Yes—it's better to speak to Varick," said Waythorn wearily.

V

The winter wore on, and society took advantage of the Waythorns' acceptance of Varick. Harassed hostesses were grateful to them for bridging over a social difficulty, and Mrs. Waythorn was held up as a miracle of good taste. Some experimental spirits could not resist the diversion of throwing Varick and his former wife together, and there were those who thought he found a zest in the propinquity. But Mrs. Waythorn's conduct remained irreproachable. She neither avoided

Varick nor sought him out. Even Waythorn could not but admit that she had discovered the solution of the newest social problem.

He had married her without giving much thought to that problem. He had fancied that a woman can shed her past like a man. But now he saw that Alice was bound to hers both by the circumstances which forced her into continued relation with it, and by the traces it had left on her nature. With grim irony Waythorn compared himself to a member of a syndicate. He held so many shares in his wife's personality and his predecessors were his partners in the business. If there had been any element of passion in the transaction he would have felt less deteriorated by it. The fact that Alice took her change of husbands like a change of weather reduced the situation to mediocrity. He could have forgiven her for blunders, for excesses; for resisting Haskett, for yielding to Varick; for anything but her acquiescence and her tact. She reminded him of a juggler tossing knives; but the knives were blunt and she knew they would never cut her.

And then, gradually, habit formed a protecting surface for his sensibilities. If he paid for each day's comfort with the small change of his illusions, he grew daily to value the comfort more and set less store upon the coin. He had drifted into a dulling propinquity with Haskett and Varick and he took refuge in the cheap revenge of satirising the situation. He even began to reckon up the advantages which accrued from it, to ask himself if it were not better to own a third of a wife who knew how to make a man happy than a whole one who had lacked opportunity to acquire the art. For it *was* an art, and made up, like all others, of concessions, eliminations and embellishments; of lights judiciously thrown and shadows skilfully softened. His wife knew exactly how to manage the lights, and he knew exactly to what training she owed her skill. He even tried to trace the source of his obligations, to discriminate between the influences which had combined to produce his domestic happiness: he perceived that Haskett's commonness had made Alice worship

good breeding, while Varick's liberal construction of the marriage bond had taught her to value the conjugal virtues; so that he was directly indebted to his predecessors for the devotion which made his life easy if not inspiring.

From this phase he passed into that of complete acceptance. He ceased to satirise himself because time dulled the irony of the situation and the joke lost its humour with its sting. Even the sight of Haskett's hat on the hall table had ceased to touch the springs of epigram. The hat was often seen there now, for it had been decided that it was better for Lily's father to visit her than for the little girl to go to his boarding-house. Waythorn, having acquiesced in this arrangement, had been surprised to find how little difference it made. Haskett was never obtrusive, and the few visitors who met him on the stairs were unaware of his identity. Waythorn did not know how often he saw Alice, but with himself Haskett was seldom in contact.

One afternoon, however, he learned on entering that Lily's father was waiting to see him. In the library he found Haskett occupying a chair in his usual provisional way. Waythorn always felt grateful to him for not leaning back.

"I hope you'll excuse me, Mr. Waythorn," he said rising. "I wanted to see Mrs. Waythorn about Lily, and your man asked me to wait here till she came in."

"Of course," said Waythorn, remembering that a sudden leak had that morning given over the drawing-room to the plumbers.

He opened his cigar-case and held it out to his visitor, and Haskett's acceptance seemed to mark a fresh stage in their intercourse. The spring evening was chilly, and Waythorn invited his guest to draw up his chair to the fire. He meant to find an excuse to leave Haskett in a moment; but he was tired and cold, and after all the little man no longer jarred on him.

The two were enclosed in the intimacy of their blended cigar-smoke when the door opened and Varick walked into the room.

Waythorn rose abruptly. It was the first time that Varick had come to the house, and the surprise of seeing him, combined with the singular inopportuneness of his arrival, gave a new edge to Waythorn's blunted sensibilities. He stared at his visitor without speaking.

Varick seemed too preoccupied to notice his host's embarrassment.

"My dear fellow," he exclaimed in his most expansive tone, "I must apologise for tumbling in on you in this way, but I was too late to catch you down town, and so I thought—"

He stopped short, catching sight of Haskett, and his sanguine colour deepened to a flush which spread vividly under his scant blond hair. But in a moment he recovered himself and nodded slightly. Haskett returned the bow in silence, and Waythorn was still groping for speech when the footman came in carrying a tea-table.

The intrusion offered a welcome vent to Waythorn's nerves. "What the deuce are you bringing this here for?" he said sharply.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but the plumbers are still in the drawing-room, and Mrs. Waythorn said she would have tea in the library." The footman's perfectly respectful tone implied a reflection on Waythorn's reasonableness.

"Oh, very well," said the latter resignedly, and the footman proceeded to open the folding tea-table and set out its complicated appointments. While this interminable process continued the three men stood motionless, watching it with a fascinated stare, till Waythorn, to break the silence, said to Varick: "Won't you have a cigar?"

He held out the case he had just tendered to Haskett, and Varick helped himself with a smile. Waythorn looked about for a match, and finding none, proffered a light from his own cigar. Haskett, in the background, held his ground mildly, examining his cigar-tip now and then, and stepping forward at the right moment to knock its ashes into the fire.

The footman at last withdrew, and Varick immediately began: "If I

could just say half a word to you about this business—”

“Certainly,” stammered Waythorn; “in the dining-room—” But as he placed his hand on the door it opened from without, and his wife appeared on the threshold.

She came in fresh and smiling, in her street dress and hat, shedding a fragrance from the boa which she loosened in advancing.

“Shall we have tea in here, dear?” she began; and then she caught sight of Varick. Her smile deepened, veiling a slight tremor of surprise.

“Why, how do you do?” she said with a distinct note of pleasure.

As she shook hands with Varick she saw Haskett standing behind him. Her smile faded for a moment, but she recalled it quickly, with a scarcely perceptible side-glance at Waythorn.

“How do you do, Mr. Haskett?” she said, and shook hands with him a shade less cordially.

The three men stood awkwardly before her, till Varick, always the most self-possessed, dashed into an explanatory phrase.

“We—I had to see Waythorn a moment on business,” he stammered, brick-red from chin to nape.

Haskett stepped forward with his air of mild obstinacy. “I am sorry to intrude; but you appointed five o’clock—” he directed his resigned glance to the time-piece on the mantel.

She swept aside their embarrassment with a charming gesture of hospitality.

“I’m so sorry—I’m always late; but the afternoon was so lovely.” She stood drawing off her gloves, propitiatory and graceful, diffusing about her a sense of ease and familiarity in which the situation lost its grotesqueness. “But before talking business,” she added brightly, “I’m sure every one wants a cup of tea.”

She dropped into her low chair by the tea-table, and the two visitors, as if drawn by her smile, advanced to receive the cups she held out.

She glanced about for Waythorn, and he took the third cup with a

laugh.

The Reckoning

THE MARRIAGE LAW of the new dispensation will be: "*Thou shalt not be unfaithful—to thyself.*"

A discreet murmur of approval filled the studio, and through the haze of cigarette smoke Mrs. Clement Westall, as her husband descended from his improvised platform, saw him merged in a congratulatory group of ladies. Westall's informal talks on "The New Ethics" had drawn about him an eager following of the mentally unemployed—those who, as he had once phrased it, liked to have their brain-food cut up for them. The talks had begun by accident. Westall's ideas were known to be "advanced," but hitherto their advance had not been in the direction of publicity. He had been, in his wife's opinion, almost pusillanimously careful not to let his personal views endanger his professional standing. Of late, however, he had shown a puzzling tendency to dogmatise, to throw down the gauntlet, to flaunt his private code in the face of society; and the relation of the sexes being a topic always sure of an audience, a few admiring friends had persuaded him to give his after-dinner opinions a larger circulation by summing them up in a series of talks at the Van Sideren studio.

The Herbert Van Siderens were a couple who subsisted, socially, on the fact that they had a studio. Van Sideren's pictures were chiefly valuable as accessories to the *mise en scène* which differentiated his wife's "afternoons" from the blighting functions held in long New York drawing-rooms, and permitted her to offer their friends whiskey-and-soda instead of tea. Mrs. Van Sideren, for her part, was

skilled in making the most of the kind of atmosphere which a lay-figure and an easel create; and if at times she found the illusion hard to maintain, and lost courage to the extent of almost wishing that Herbert could paint, she promptly overcame such moments of weakness by calling in some fresh talent, some extraneous reinforcement of the "artistic" impression. It was in quest of such aid that she had seized on Westall, coaxing him, somewhat to his wife's surprise, into a flattered participation in her fraud. It was vaguely felt, in the Van Sideren circle, that all the audacities were artistic, and that a teacher who pronounced marriage immoral was somehow as distinguished as a painter who depicted purple grass and a green sky. The Van Sideren set were tired of the conventional colour-scheme in art and conduct.

Julia Westall had long had her own views on the immorality of marriage; she might indeed have claimed her husband as a disciple. In the early days of their union she had secretly resented his disinclination to proclaim himself a follower of the new creed; had been inclined to tax him with moral cowardice, with a failure to live up to the convictions for which their marriage was supposed to stand. That was in the first burst of propagandism, when, womanlike, she wanted to turn her disobedience into a law. Now she felt differently. She could hardly account for the change, yet being a woman who never allowed her impulses to remain unaccounted for, she tried to do so by saying that she did not care to have the articles of her faith misinterpreted by the vulgar. In this connection, she was beginning to think that almost every one was vulgar; certainly there were few to whom she would have cared to intrust the defence of so esoteric a doctrine. And it was precisely at this point that Westall, discarding his unspoken principles, had chosen to descend from the heights of privacy, and stand hawking his convictions at the street-corner!

It was Una Van Sideren who, on this occasion, unconsciously focussed upon herself Mrs. Westall's wandering resentment. In the

first place, the girl had no business to be there. It was "horrid"—Mrs. Westall found herself slipping back into the old feminine vocabulary—simply "horrid" to think of a young girl's being allowed to listen to such talk. The fact that Una smoked cigarettes and sipped an occasional cocktail did not in the least tarnish a certain radiant innocence which made her appear the victim, rather than the accomplice, of her parents' vulgarities. Julia Westall felt in a hot helpless way that something ought to be done—that some one ought to speak to the girl's mother. And just then Una glided up.

"Oh, Mrs. Westall, how beautiful it was!" Una fixed her with large limpid eyes. "You believe it all, I suppose?" she asked with seraphic gravity.

"All—what, my dear child?"

The girl shone on her. "About the higher life—the freer expansion of the individual—the law of fidelity to one's self," she glibly recited.

Mrs. Westall, to her own wonder, blushed a deep and burning blush.

"My dear Una," she said, "you don't in the least understand what it's all about!"

Miss Van Sideren stared, with a slowly answering blush. "Don't *you*, then?" she murmured.

Mrs. Westall laughed. "Not always—or altogether! But I should like some tea, please."

Una led her to the corner where innocent beverages were dispensed. As Julia received her cup she scrutinised the girl more carefully. It was not such a girlish face, after all—definite lines were forming under the rosy haze of youth. She reflected that Una must be six-and-twenty, and wondered why she had not married. A nice stock of ideas she would have as her dower! If *they* were to be a part of the modern girl's trousseau—

Mrs. Westall caught herself up with a start. It was as though some one else had been speaking—a stranger who had borrowed her own voice: she felt herself the dupe of some fantastic mental

ventriloquism. Concluding suddenly that the room was stifling and Una's tea too sweet, she set down her cup and looked about for Westall: to meet his eyes had long been her refuge from every uncertainty. She met them now, but only, as she felt, in transit; they included her parenthetically in a larger flight. She followed the flight, and it carried her to a corner to which Una had withdrawn—one of the palmy nooks to which Mrs. Van Sideren attributed the success of her Saturdays. Westall, a moment later, had overtaken his look, and found a place at the girl's side. She bent forward, speaking eagerly; he leaned back, listening, with the depreciatory smile which acted as a filter to flattery, enabling him to swallow the strongest doses without apparent grossness of appetite. Julia winced at her own definition of the smile.

On the way home, in the deserted winter dusk, Westall surprised his wife by a sudden boyish pressure of her arm. "Did I open their eyes a bit? Did I tell them what you wanted me to?" he asked gaily.

Almost unconsciously, she let her arm slip from his. "What I wanted—?"

"Why, haven't you—all this time?" She caught the honest wonder of his tone. "I somehow fancied you'd rather blamed me for not talking more openly—before—. You almost made me feel, at times, that I was sacrificing principles to expediency."

She paused a moment over her reply; then she asked quietly: "What made you decide not to—any longer?"

She felt again the vibration of a faint surprise. "Why—the wish to please you!" he answered, almost too simply.

"I wish you would not go on, then," she said abruptly.

He stopped in his quick walk, and she felt his stare through the darkness.

"Not go on—?"

"Call a hansom, please. I'm tired," broke from her with a sudden rush of physical weariness.

Instantly his solicitude enveloped her. The room had been

infernally hot—and then that confounded cigarette smoke—he had noticed once or twice that she looked pale—she mustn't come to another Saturday. She felt herself yielding, as she always did, to the warm influence of his concern for her, the feminine in her leaning on the man in him with a conscious intensity of abandonment. He put her in the hansom, and her hand stole into his in the darkness. A tear or two rose, and she let them fall. It was so delicious to cry over imaginary troubles!

That evening, after dinner, he surprised her by reverting to the subject of his talk. He combined a man's dislike of uncomfortable questions with an almost feminine skill in eluding them; and she knew that if he returned to the subject he must have some special reason for doing so.

"You seem not to have cared for what I said this afternoon. Did I put the case badly?"

"No—you put it very well."

"Then what did you mean by saying that you would rather not have me go on with it?"

She glanced at him nervously, her ignorance of his intention deepening her sense of helplessness.

"I don't think I care to hear such things discussed in public."

"I don't understand you," he exclaimed. Again the feeling that his surprise was genuine gave an air of obliquity to her own attitude. She was not sure that she understood herself.

"Won't you explain?" he said with a tinge of impatience.

Her eyes wandered about the familiar drawing-room which had been the scene of so many of their evening confidences. The shaded lamps, the quiet-coloured walls hung with mezzotints, the pale spring flowers scattered here and there in Venice glasses and bowls of old Sèvres, recalled, she hardly knew why, the apartment in which the evenings of her first marriage had been passed—a wilderness of rosewood and upholstery, with a picture of a Roman peasant above the mantelpiece, and a Greek slave in "statuary marble" between the

folding-doors of the back drawing-room. It was a room with which she had never been able to establish any closer relation than that between a traveller and a railway station; and now, as she looked about at the surroundings which stood for her deepest affinities—the room for which she had left that other room—she was startled by the same sense of strangeness and unfamiliarity. The prints, the flowers, the subdued tones of the old porcelains, seemed to typify a superficial refinement which had no relation to the deeper significances of life.

Suddenly she heard her husband repeating his question. “I don’t know that I can explain,” she faltered.

He drew his arm-chair forward so that he faced her across the hearth. The light of a reading-lamp fell on his finely drawn face, which had a kind of surface-sensitiveness akin to the surface-refinement of its setting.

“Is it that you no longer believe in our ideas?” he asked.

“In our ideas—?”

“The ideas I am trying to teach. The ideas you and I are supposed to stand for.” He paused a moment. “The ideas on which our marriage was founded.”

The blood rushed to her face. He had his reasons, then—she was sure now that he had his reasons! In the ten years of their marriage, how often had either of them stopped to consider the ideas on which it was founded? How often does a man dig about the basement of his house to examine its foundation? The foundation is there, of course—the house rests on it—but one lives abovestairs and not in the cellar. It was she, indeed, who in the beginning had insisted on reviewing the situation now and then, on recapitulating the reasons which justified her course, on proclaiming, from time to time, her adherence to the religion of personal independence; but she had long ceased to feel the want of any such ideal standards, and had accepted her marriage as frankly and naturally as though it had been based on the primitive needs of the heart, and required no special sanction to

explain or justify it.

"Of course I still believe in our ideas!" she exclaimed.

"Then I repeat that I don't understand. It was a part of your theory that the greatest possible publicity should be given to our view of marriage. Have you changed your mind in that respect?"

She hesitated. "It depends on circumstances—on the public one is addressing. The set of people that the Van Siderens get about them don't care for the truth or falseness of a doctrine. They are attracted simply by its novelty."

"And yet it was in just such a set of people that you and I met, and learned the truth from each other."

"That was different."

"In what way?"

"I was not a young girl, to begin with. It is perfectly unfitting that young girls should be present at—at such times— should hear such things discussed—"

"I thought you considered it one of the deepest social wrongs that such things never *are* discussed before young girls; but that is beside the point, for I don't remember seeing any young girl in my audience to-day—"

"Except Una Van Sideren!"

He turned slightly and pushed back the lamp at his elbow.

"Oh, Miss Van Sideren—naturally—"

"Why naturally?"

"The daughter of the house—would you have had her sent out with her governess?"

"If I had a daughter I should not allow such things to go on in my house!"

Westall, stroking his mustache, leaned back with a faint smile. "I fancy Miss Van Sideren is quite capable of taking care of herself."

"No girl knows how to take care of herself—till it's too late."

"And yet you would deliberately deny her the surest means of self-defence?"

“What do you call the surest means of self-defence?”

“Some preliminary knowledge of human nature in its relation to the marriage tie.”

She made an impatient gesture. “How should you like to marry that kind of a girl?”

“Immensely—if she were my kind of girl in other respects.”

She took up the argument at another point.

“You are quite mistaken if you think such talk does not affect young girls. Una was in a state of the most absurd exaltation—” She broke off, wondering why she had spoken.

Westall reopened a magazine which he had laid aside at the beginning of their discussion. “What you tell me is immensely flattering to my oratorical talent—but I fear you overrate its effect. I can assure you that Miss Van Sideren doesn’t have to have her thinking done for her. She’s quite capable of doing it herself.”

“You seem very familiar with her mental processes!” flashed unguardedly from his wife.

He looked up quietly from the pages he was cutting.

“I should like to be,” he answered. “She interests me.”

II

If there be a distinction in being misunderstood, it was one denied to Julia Westall when she left her first husband. Every one was ready to excuse and even to defend her. The world she adorned agreed that John Arment was “impossible,” and hostesses gave a sigh of relief at the thought that it would no longer be necessary to ask him to dine.

There had been no scandal connected with the divorce: neither side had accused the other of the offence euphemistically described as “statutory.” The Arments had indeed been obliged to transfer their allegiance to a State which recognized desertion as a cause for divorce, and construed the term so liberally that the seeds of desertion were shown to exist in every union. Even Mrs. Arment’s second marriage did not make traditional morality stir in its sleep. It

was known that she had not met her second husband till after she had parted from the first, and she had, moreover, replaced a rich man by a poor one. Though Clement Westall was acknowledged to be a rising lawyer, it was generally felt that his fortunes would not rise as rapidly as his reputation. The Westalls would probably always have to live quietly and go out to dinner in cabs. Could there be better evidence of Mrs. Arment's complete disinterestedness?

If the reasoning by which her friends justified her course was somewhat cruder and less complex than her own elucidation of the matter, both explanations led to the same conclusion: John Arment was impossible. The only difference was that, to his wife, his impossibility was something deeper than a social disqualification. She had once said, in ironical defence of her marriage, that it had at least preserved her from the necessity of sitting next to him at dinner; but she had not then realised at what cost the immunity was purchased. John Arment was impossible; but the sting of his impossibility lay in the fact that he made it impossible for those about him to be other than himself. By an unconscious process of elimination he had excluded from the world everything of which he did not feel a personal need: had become, as it were, a climate in which only his own requirements survived. This might seem to imply a deliberate selfishness; but there was nothing deliberate about Arment. He was as instinctive as an animal or a child. It was this childish element in his nature which sometimes for a moment unsettled his wife's estimate of him. Was it possible that he was simply undeveloped, that he had delayed, somewhat longer than is usual, the laborious process of growing up? He had the kind of sporadic shrewdness which causes it to be said of a dull man that he is "no fool"; and it was this quality that his wife found most trying. Even to the naturalist it is annoying to have his deductions disturbed by some unforeseen aberrancy of form or function; and how much more so to the wife whose estimate of herself is inevitably bound up with her judgment of her husband!

Arment's shrewdness did not, indeed, imply any latent intellectual power; it suggested, rather, potentialities of feeling, of suffering, perhaps, in a blind rudimentary way, on which Julia's sensibilities naturally declined to linger. She so fully understood her own reasons for leaving him that she disliked to think they were not as comprehensible to her husband. She was haunted, in her analytic moments, by the look of perplexity, too inarticulate for words, with which he had acquiesced in her explanations.

These moments were rare with her, however. Her marriage had been too concrete a misery to be surveyed philosophically. If she had been unhappy for complex reasons, the unhappiness was as real as though it had been uncomplicated. Soul is more bruisable than flesh, and Julia was wounded in every fibre of her spirit. Her husband's personality seemed to be closing gradually in on her, obscuring the sky and cutting off the air, till she felt herself shut up among the decaying bodies of her starved hopes. A sense of having been decoyed by some world-old conspiracy into this bondage of body and soul filled her with despair. If marriage was the slow life-long acquittal of a debt contracted in ignorance, then marriage was a crime against human nature. She, for one, would have no share in maintaining the pretence of which she had been a victim: the pretence that a man and a woman, forced into the narrowest of personal relations, must remain there till the end, though they may have outgrown the span of each other's natures as the mature tree outgrows the iron brace about the sapling.

It was in the first heat of her moral indignation that she had met Clement Westall. She had seen at once that he was "interested," and had fought off the discovery, dreading any influence that should draw her back into the bondage of conventional relations. To ward off the peril she had, with an almost crude precipitancy, revealed her opinions to him. To her surprise, she found that he shared them. She was attracted by the frankness of a suitor who, while pressing his suit, admitted that he did not believe in marriage. Her worst

audacities did not seem to surprise him: he had thought out all that she had felt, and they had reached the same conclusion. People grew at varying rates, and the yoke that was an easy fit for the one might soon become galling to the other. That was what divorce was for: the readjustment of personal relations. As soon as their necessarily transitive nature was recognised they would gain in dignity as well as in harmony. There would be no farther need of the ignoble concessions and connivances, the perpetual sacrifice of personal delicacy and moral pride, by means of which imperfect marriages were now held together. Each partner to the contract would be on his mettle, forced to live up to the highest standard of self-development, on pain of losing the other's respect and affection. The low nature could no longer drag the higher down, but must struggle to rise, or remain alone on its inferior level. The only necessary condition to a harmonious marriage was a frank recognition of this truth, and a solemn agreement between the contracting parties to keep faith with themselves, and not to live together for a moment after complete accord had ceased to exist between them. The new adultery was unfaithfulness to self.

It was, as Westall had just reminded her, on this understanding that they had married. The ceremony was an unimportant concession to social prejudice: now that the door of divorce stood open, no marriage need be an imprisonment, and the contract therefore no longer involved any diminution of self-respect. The nature of their attachment placed them so far beyond the reach of such contingencies that it was easy to discuss them with an open mind; and Julia's sense of security made her dwell with a tender insistence on Westall's promise to claim his release when he should cease to love her. The exchange of these vows seemed to make them, in a sense, champions of the new law, pioneers in the forbidden realm of individual freedom: they felt that they had somehow achieved beatitude without martyrdom.

This, as Julia now reviewed the past, she perceived to have been

her theoretical attitude toward marriage. It was unconsciously, insidiously, that her ten years of happiness with Westall had developed another conception of the tie; a reversion, rather, to the old instinct of passionate dependency and possession that now made her blood revolt at the mere hint of change. Change? Renewal? Was that what they had called it, in their foolish jargon? Destruction, extermination rather—this rending of a myriad fibres interwoven with another's being! Another? But he was not other! He and she were one, one in the mystic sense which alone gave marriage its significance. The new law was not for them, but for the disunited creatures forced into a mockery of union. The gospel she had felt called on to proclaim had no bearing on her own case. . . . She sent for the doctor and told him she was sure she needed a nerve tonic.

She took the nerve tonic diligently, but it failed to act as a sedative to her fears. She did not know what she feared; but that made her anxiety the more pervasive. Her husband had not reverted to the subject of his Saturday talks. He was unusually kind and considerate, with a softening of his quick manner, a touch of shyness in his consideration, that sickened her with new fears. She told herself that it was because she looked badly—because he knew about the doctor and the nerve tonic—that he showed this deference to her wishes, this eagerness to screen her from moral draughts; but the explanation simply cleared the way for fresh inferences.

The week passed slowly, vacantly, like a prolonged Sunday. On Saturday the morning post brought a note from Mrs. Van Sideren. Would dear Julia ask Mr. Westall to come half an hour earlier than usual, as there was to be some music after his "talk"? Westall was just leaving for his office when his wife read the note. She opened the drawing-room door and called him back to deliver the message.

He glanced at the note and tossed it aside. "What a bore! I shall have to cut my game of racquets. Well, I suppose it can't be helped. Will you write and say it's all right?"

Julia hesitated a moment, her hand stiffening on the chair-back

against which she leaned.

"You mean to go on with these talks?" she asked.

"I—why not?" he returned; and this time it struck her that his surprise was not quite unfeigned. The perception helped her to find words.

"You said you had started them with the idea of pleasing me—"

"Well?"

"I told you last week that they didn't please me."

"Last week?—Oh—" He seemed to make an effort of memory. "I thought you were nervous then; you sent for the doctor the next day."

"It was not the doctor I needed; it was your assurance—"

"My assurance?"

Suddenly she felt the floor fail under her. She sank into the chair with a choking throat, her words, her reasons slipping away from her like straws down a whirling flood.

"Clement," she cried, "isn't it enough for you to know that I hate it?"

He turned to close the door behind them; then he walked toward her and sat down. "What is it that you hate?" he asked gently.

She had made a desperate effort to rally her routed argument.

"I can't bear to have you speak as if—as if—our marriage—were like the other kind—the wrong kind. When I heard you there, the other afternoon, before all those inquisitive gossiping people, proclaiming that husbands and wives had a right to leave each other whenever they were tired—or had seen some one else—"

Westall sat motionless, his eyes fixed on a pattern of the carpet.

"You *have* ceased to take this view, then?" he said as she broke off. "You no longer believe that husbands and wives *are* justified in separating—under such conditions?"

"Under such conditions?" she stammered. "Yes—I still believe that—but how can we judge for others? What can we know of the circumstances—?"

He interrupted her. "I thought it was a fundamental article of our creed that the special circumstances produced by marriage were not to interfere with the full assertion of individual liberty." He paused a moment. "I thought that was your reason for leaving Arment."

She flushed to the forehead. It was not like him to give a personal turn to the argument.

"It was my reason," she said simply.

"Well, then—why do you refuse to recognise its validity now?"

"I don't—I don't—I only say that one can't judge for others."

He made an impatient movement. "This is mere hairsplitting. What you mean is that, the doctrine having served your purpose when you needed it, you now repudiate it."

"Well," she exclaimed, flushing again, "what if I do? What does it matter to us?"

Westall rose from his chair. He was excessively pale, and stood before his wife with something of the formality of a stranger.

"It matters to me," he said in a low voice, "because I do *not* repudiate it."

"Well—?"

"And because I had intended to invoke it as"—

He paused and drew his breath deeply. She sat silent, almost deafened by her heart-beats.

—"as a complete justification of the course I am about to take."

Julia remained motionless. "What course is that?" she asked.

He cleared his throat. "I mean to claim the fulfilment of your promise."

For an instant the room wavered and darkened; then she recovered a torturing acuteness of vision. Every detail of her surroundings pressed upon her: the tick of the clock, the slant of sunlight on the wall, the hardness of the chair-arms that she grasped, were a separate wound to each sense.

"My promise—" she faltered.

"Your part of our mutual agreement to set each other free if one or

the other should wish to be released.”

She was silent again. He waited a moment, shifting his position nervously; then he said, with a touch of irritability: “You acknowledge the agreement?”

The question went through her like a shock. She lifted her head to it proudly. “I acknowledge the agreement,” she said.

“And—you don’t mean to repudiate it?”

A log on the hearth fell forward, and mechanically he advanced and pushed it back.

“No,” she answered slowly, “I don’t mean to repudiate it.”

There was a pause. He remained near the hearth, his elbow resting on the mantel-shelf. Close to his hand stood a little cup of jade that he had given her on one of their wedding anniversaries. She wondered vaguely if he noticed it.

“You intend to leave me, then?” she said at length.

His gesture seemed to deprecate the crudeness of the allusion.

“To marry some one else?”

Again his eye and hand protested. She rose and stood before him.

“Why should you be afraid to tell me? Is it Una Van Sideren?”

He was silent.

“I wish you good luck,” she said.

III

She looked up, finding herself alone. She did not remember when or how he had left the room, or how long afterward she had sat there. The fire still smouldered on the hearth, but the slant of sunlight had left the wall.

Her first conscious thought was that she had not broken her word, that she had fulfilled the very letter of their bargain. There had been no crying out, no vain appeal to the past, no attempt at temporising or evasion. She had marched straight up to the guns.

Now that it was over, she sickened to find herself alive. She looked about her, trying to recover her hold on reality. Her identity seemed

to be slipping from her, as it disappears in a physical swoon. "This is my room—this is my house," she heard herself saying. Her room? Her house? She could almost hear the walls laugh back at her.

She stood up, weariness in every bone. The silence of the room frightened her. She remembered, now, having heard the front door close a long time ago: the sound suddenly reechoed through her brain. Her husband must have left the house, then—her *husband*? She no longer knew in what terms to think: the simplest phrases had a poisoned edge. She sank back into her chair, overcome by a strange weakness. The clock struck ten—it was only ten o'clock! Suddenly she remembered that she had not ordered dinner . . . or were they dining out that evening? *Dinner—dining out*—the old meaningless phraseology pursued her! She must try to think of herself as she would think of some one else, a some one dissociated from all the familiar routine of the past, whose wants and habits must gradually be learned, as one might spy out the ways of a strange animal. . . .

The clock struck another hour—eleven. She stood up again and walked to the door: she thought she would go up stairs to her room. *Her room*? Again the word derided her. She opened the door, crossed the narrow hall, and walked up the stairs. As she passed, she noticed Westall's sticks and umbrellas: a pair of his gloves lay on the hall table. The same stair-carpet mounted between the same walls; the same old French print, in its narrow black frame, faced her on the landing. This visual continuity was intolerable. Within, a gaping chasm; without, the same untroubled and familiar surface. She must get away from it before she could attempt to think. But, once in her room, she sat down on the lounge, a stupor creeping over her. . . .

Gradually her vision cleared. A great deal had happened in the interval—a wild marching and countermarching of emotions, arguments, ideas—a fury of insurgent impulses that fell back spent upon themselves. She had tried, at first, to rally, to organise these chaotic forces. There must be help somewhere, if only she could master the inner tumult. Life could not be broken off short like this,

for a whim, a fancy; the law itself would side with her, would defend her. The law? What claim had she upon it? She was the prisoner of her own choice: she had been her own legislator, and she was the predestined victim of the code she had devised. But this was grotesque, intolerable—a mad mistake, for which she could not be held accountable! The law she had despised was still there, might still be invoked . . . invoked, but to what end? Could she ask it to chain Westall to her side? *She* had been allowed to go free when she claimed her freedom—should she show less magnanimity than she had exacted? Magnanimity? The word lashed her with its irony—one does not strike an attitude when one is fighting for life! She would threaten, grovel, cajole . . . she would yield anything to keep her hold on happiness. Ah, but the difficulty lay deeper! The law could not help her—her own apostasy could not help her. She was the victim of the theories she renounced. It was as though some giant machine of her own making had caught her up in its wheels and was grinding her to atoms. . . .

It was afternoon when she found herself out-of-doors. She walked with an aimless haste, fearing to meet familiar faces. The day was radiant, metallic: one of those searching American days so calculated to reveal the shortcomings of our street-cleaning and the excesses of our architecture. The streets looked bare and hideous; everything stared and glittered. She called a passing hansom, and gave Mrs. Van Sideren's address. She did not know what had led up to the act; but she found herself suddenly resolved to speak, to cry out a warning. It was too late to save herself—but the girl might still be told. The hansom rattled up Fifth Avenue; she sat with her eyes fixed, avoiding recognition. At the Van Siderens' door she sprang out and rang the bell. Action had cleared her brain, and she felt calm and self-possessed. She knew now exactly what she meant to say.

The ladies were both out . . . the parlour-maid stood waiting for a card. Julia, with a vague murmur, turned away from the door and lingered a moment on the sidewalk. Then she remembered that she

had not paid the cab-driver. She drew a dollar from her purse and handed it to him. He touched his hat and drove off, leaving her alone in the long empty street. She wandered away westward, toward strange thoroughfares, where she was not likely to meet acquaintances. The feeling of aimlessness had returned. Once she found herself in the afternoon torrent of Broadway, swept past tawdry shops and flaming theatrical posters, with a succession of meaningless faces gliding by in the opposite direction. . . .

A feeling of faintness reminded her that she had not eaten since morning. She turned into a side street of shabby houses, with rows of ash-barrels behind bent area railings. In a basement window she saw the sign *Ladies' Restaurant*: a pie and a dish of doughnuts lay against the dusty pane like petrified food in an ethnological museum. She entered, and a young woman with a weak mouth and a brazen eye cleared a table for her near the window. The table was covered with a red and white cotton cloth and adorned with a bunch of celery in a thick tumbler and a salt-cellar full of grayish lumpy salt. Julia ordered tea, and sat a long time waiting for it. She was glad to be away from the noise and confusion of the streets. The low-ceilinged room was empty, and two or three waitresses with thin pert faces lounged in the background staring at her and whispering together. At last the tea was brought in a discoloured metal teapot. Julia poured a cup and drank it hastily. It was black and bitter, but it flowed through her veins like an elixir. She was almost dizzy with exhilaration. Oh, how tired, how unutterably tired she had been!

She drank a second cup, blacker and bitterer, and now her mind was once more working clearly. She felt as vigorous, as decisive, as when she had stood on the Van Siderens' doorstep—but the wish to return there had subsided. She saw now the futility of such an attempt—the humiliation to which it might have exposed her. . . . The pity of it was that she did not know what to do next. The short winter day was fading, and she realised that she could not remain much longer in the restaurant without attracting notice. She paid for

her tea and went out into the street. The lamps were alight, and here and there a basement shop cast an oblong of gas-light across the fissured pavement. In the dusk there was something sinister about the aspect of the street, and she hastened back toward Fifth Avenue. She was not used to being out alone at that hour.

At the corner of Fifth Avenue she paused and stood watching the stream of carriages. At last a policeman caught sight of her and signed to her that he would take her across. She had not meant to cross the street, but she obeyed automatically, and presently found herself on the farther corner. There she paused again for a moment; but she fancied the policeman was watching her, and this sent her hastening down the nearest side street. . . . After that she walked a long time, vaguely. . . . Night had fallen, and now and then, through the windows of a passing carriage, she caught the expanse of an evening waistcoat or the shimmer of an opera cloak. . . .

Suddenly she found herself in a familiar street. She stood still a moment, breathing quickly. She had turned the corner without noticing whither it led; but now, a few yards ahead of her, she saw the house in which she had once lived—her first husband's house. The blinds were drawn, and only a faint translucence marked the windows and the transom above the door. As she stood there she heard a step behind her, and a man walked by in the direction of the house. He walked slowly, with a heavy middle-aged gait, his head sunk a little between the shoulders, the red crease of his neck visible above the fur collar of his overcoat. He crossed the street, went up the steps of the house, drew forth a latchkey, and let himself in. . . .

There was no one else in sight. Julia leaned for a long time against the area-rail at the corner, her eyes fixed on the front of the house. The feeling of physical weariness had returned, but the strong tea still throbbed in her veins and lit her brain with an unnatural clearness. Presently she heard another step draw near, and moving quickly away, she too crossed the street and mounted the steps of the house. The impulse which had carried her there prolonged itself in a

quick pressure of the electric bell—then she felt suddenly weak and tremulous, and grasped the balustrade for support. The door opened and a young footman with a fresh inexperienced face stood on the threshold. Julia knew in an instant that he would admit her.

“I saw Mr. Arment going in just now,” she said. “Will you ask him to see me for a moment?”

The footman hesitated. “I think Mr. Arment has gone up to dress for dinner, madam.”

Julia advanced into the hall. “I am sure he will see me—I will not detain him long,” she said. She spoke quietly, authoritatively, in the tone which a good servant does not mistake. The footman had his hand on the drawing-room door.

“I will tell him, madam. What name, please?”

Julia trembled: she had not thought of that. “Merely say a lady,” she returned carelessly.

The footman wavered and she fancied herself lost; but at that instant the door opened from within and John Arment stepped into the hall. He drew back sharply as he saw her, his florid face turning sallow with the shock; then the blood poured back to it, swelling the veins on his temples and reddening the lobes of his thick ears.

It was long since Julia had seen him, and she was startled at the change in his appearance. He had thickened, coarsened, settled down into the enclosing flesh. But she noted this insensibly: her one conscious thought was that, now she was face to face with him, she must not let him escape till he had heard her. Every pulse in her body throbbed with the urgency of her message.

She went up to him as he drew back. “I must speak to you,” she said.

Arment hesitated, red and stammering. Julia glanced at the footman, and her look acted as a warning. The instinctive shrinking from a “scene” predominated over every other impulse, and Arment said slowly: “Will you come this way?”

He followed her into the drawing-room and closed the door. Julia,

as she advanced, was vaguely aware that the room at least was unchanged: time had not mitigated its horrors. The contadina still lurched from the chimney-breast, and the Greek slave obstructed the threshold of the inner room. The place was alive with memories: they started out from every fold of the yellow satin curtains and glided between the angles of the rosewood furniture. But while some subordinate agency was carrying these impressions to her brain, her whole conscious effort was centred in the act of dominating Arment's will. The fear that he would refuse to hear her mounted like fever to her brain. She felt her purpose melt before it, words and arguments running into each other in the heat of her longing. For a moment her voice failed her, and she imagined herself thrust out before she could speak; but as she was struggling for a word Arment pushed a chair forward, and said quietly: "You are not well."

The sound of his voice steadied her. It was neither kind nor unkind—a voice that suspended judgment, rather, awaiting unforeseen developments. She supported herself against the back of the chair and drew a deep breath.

"Shall I send for something?" he continued, with a cold embarrassed politeness.

Julia raised an entreating hand. "No—no—thank you. I am quite well."

He paused midway toward the bell, and turned on her. "Then may I ask—?"

"Yes," she interrupted him. "I came here because I wanted to see you. There is something I must tell you."

Arment continued to scrutinise her. "I am surprised at that," he said. "I should have supposed that any communication you may wish to make could have been made through our lawyers."

"Our lawyers!" She burst into a little laugh. "I don't think they could help me—this time."

Arment's face took on a barricaded look. "If there is any question of help—of course—"

It struck her, whimsically, that she had seen that look when some shabby devil called with a subscription-book. Perhaps he thought she wanted him to put his name down for so much in sympathy—or even in money. . . . The thought made her laugh again. She saw his look change slowly to perplexity. All his facial changes were slow, and she remembered, suddenly, how it had once diverted her to shift that lumbering scenery with a word. For the first time it struck her that she had been cruel. “There is a question of help,” she said in a softer key; “you can help me; but only by listening. . . . I want to tell you something. . . .”

Arment’s resistance was not yielding. “Would it not be easier to—write?” he suggested.

She shook her head. “There is no time to write . . . and it won’t take long.” She raised her head and their eyes met. “My husband has left me,” she said.

“Westall—?” he stammered, reddening again.

“Yes. This morning. Just as I left you. Because he was tired of me.”

The words, uttered scarcely above a whisper, seemed to dilate to the limit of the room. Arment looked toward the door; then his embarrassed glance returned to Julia.

“I am very sorry,” he said awkwardly.

“Thank you,” she murmured.

“But I don’t see—”

“No—but you will—in a moment. Won’t you listen to me? Please!” Instinctively she had shifted her position, putting herself between him and the door. “It happened this morning,” she went on in short breathless phrases. “I never suspected anything—I thought we were—perfectly happy. . . . Suddenly he told me he was tired of me . . . there is a girl he likes better. . . . He has gone to her. . . .” As she spoke, the lurking anguish rose upon her, possessing her once more to the exclusion of every other emotion. Her eyes ached, her throat swelled with it, and two painful tears ran down her face.

Arment’s constraint was increasing visibly. “This—this is very

unfortunate," he began. "But I should say the law—"

"The law?" she echoed ironically. "When he asks for his freedom?"

"You are not obliged to give it."

"You were not obliged to give me mine—but you did."

He made a protesting gesture.

"You saw that the law couldn't help you—didn't you?" she went on. "That is what I see now. The law represents material rights—it can't go beyond. If we don't recognise an inner law . . . the obligation that love creates . . . being loved as well as loving . . . there is nothing to prevent our spreading ruin unhindered . . . is there?" She raised her head plaintively, with the look of a bewildered child. "That is what I see now . . . what I wanted to tell you. He leaves me because he's tired . . . but *I* was not tired; and I don't understand why he is. That's the dreadful part of it—the not understanding: I hadn't realised what it meant. But I've been thinking of it all day, and things have come back to me—things I hadn't noticed . . . when you and I . . ." She moved closer to him, and fixed her eyes on his with the gaze which tries to reach beyond words. "I see now that *you* didn't understand—did you?"

Their eyes met in a sudden shock of comprehension: a veil seemed to be lifted between them. Arment's lip trembled.

"No," he said, "I didn't understand."

She gave a little cry, almost of triumph. "I knew it! I knew it! You wondered—you tried to tell me—but no words came. . . . You saw your life falling in ruins . . . the world slipping from you . . . and you couldn't speak or move!"

She sank down on the chair against which she had been leaning. "Now I know—now I know," she repeated.

"I am very sorry for you," she heard Arment stammer.

She looked up quickly. "That's not what I came for. I don't want you to be sorry. I came to ask you to forgive me . . . for not understanding that *you* didn't understand. . . . That's all I wanted to say." She rose with a vague sense that the end had come, and put out

a groping hand toward the door.

Arment stood motionless. She turned to him with a faint smile.

“You forgive me?”

“There is nothing to forgive—”

“Then you will shake hands for good-bye?” She felt his hand in hers: it was nerveless, reluctant.

“Good-bye,” she repeated. “I understand now.”

She opened the door and passed out into the hall. As she did so, Arment took an impulsive step forward; but just then the footman, who was evidently alive to his obligations, advanced from the background to let her out. She heard Arment fall back. The footman threw open the door, and she found herself outside in the darkness.

Expiation

I CAN NEVER," said Mrs. Fetherel, "hear the bell ring without a shudder."

Her unruffled aspect—she was the kind of woman whose emotions never communicate themselves to her clothes—and the conventional background of the New York drawing-room, with its pervading implication of an imminent tea-tray and of an atmosphere in which the social functions have become purely reflex, lent to her declaration a relief not lost on her cousin Mrs. Clinch, who, from the other side of the fireplace, agreed, with a glance at the clock, that it *was* the hour for bores.

"Bores!" cried Mrs. Fetherel impatiently. "If I shuddered at *them*, I should have a chronic ague!"

She leaned forward and laid a sparkling finger on her cousin's shabby black knee. "I mean the newspaper clippings," she whispered.

Mrs. Clinch returned a glance of intelligence. "They've begun already?"

"Not yet; but they're sure to now, at any minute, my publisher tells me."

Mrs. Fetherel's look of apprehension sat oddly on her small features, which had an air of neat symmetry somehow suggestive of being set in order every morning by the housemaid. Someone (there was rumours that it was her cousin) had once said that Paula Fetherel would have been very pretty if she hadn't looked so like a moral axiom in a copy-book hand.

Mrs. Clinch received her confidence with a smile. "Well," she said,

"I suppose you were prepared for the consequences of authorship?"

Mrs. Fetherel blushed brightly. "It isn't their coming," she owned—"it's their coming *now*."

"Now?"

"The Bishop's in town."

Mrs. Clinch leaned back and shaped her lips to a whistle which deflected in a laugh. "Well!" she said.

"You see!" Mrs. Fetherel triumphed.

"Well—weren't you prepared for the Bishop?"

"Not now—at least, I hadn't thought of his seeing the clippings."

"And why should he see them?"

"Bella—*won't* you understand? It's John."

"John?"

"Who has taken the most unexpected tone—one might almost say out of perversity."

"Oh, perversity—" Mrs. Clinch murmured, observing her cousin between lids wrinkled by amusement. "What tone has John taken?"

Mrs. Fetherel threw out her answer with the desperate gesture of a woman who lays bare the traces of a marital fist. "The tone of being proud of my book."

The measure of Mrs. Clinch's enjoyment overflowed in laughter.

"Oh, you may laugh," Mrs. Fetherel insisted, "but it's no joke to me. In the first place, John's liking the book is so—so—such a false note—it puts me in such a ridiculous position; and then it has set him watching for the reviews—who would ever have suspected John of knowing that books were *reviewed*? Why, he's actually found out about the Clipping Bureau, and whenever the postman rings I hear John rush out of the library to see if there are any yellow envelopes. Of course, when they *do* come he'll bring them into the drawing-room and read them aloud to everybody who happens to be here—and the Bishop is sure to happen to be here!"

Mrs. Clinch repressed her amusement. "The picture you draw is a lurid one," she conceded, "but your modesty strikes me as abnormal,

especially in an author. The chances are that some of the clippings will be rather pleasant reading. The critics are not all union men.”

Mrs. Fetherel stared. “Union men?”

“Well, I mean they don’t all belong to the well-known Society-for-the-Persecution-of-Rising-Authors. Some of them have even been known to defy its regulations and say a good word for a new writer.”

“Oh, I dare say,” said Mrs. Fetherel, with the laugh her cousin’s epigram exacted. “But you don’t quite see my point. I’m not at all nervous about the success of my book—my publisher tells me I have no need to be—but I *am* afraid of its being a *succès de scandale*.”

“Mercy!” said Mrs. Clinch, sitting up.

The butler and footman at this moment appeared with the tea-tray, and when they had withdrawn, Mrs. Fetherel, bending her brightly rippled head above the kettle, continued in a murmur of avowal, “The title, even, is a kind of challenge.”

“‘Fast and Loose,’ ” Mrs. Clinch mused. “Yes, it ought to take.”

“I didn’t choose it for that reason!” the author protested. “I should have preferred something quieter—less pronounced; but I was determined not to shirk the responsibility of what I had written. I want people to know beforehand exactly what kind of book they are buying.”

“Well,” said Mrs. Clinch, “that’s a degree of conscientiousness that I’ve never met with before. So few books fulfil the promise of their titles that experienced readers never expect the fare to come up to the menu.”

“‘Fast and Loose’ will be no disappointment on that score,” her cousin significantly returned. “I’ve handled the subject without gloves. I’ve called a spade a spade.”

“You simply make my mouth water! And to think I haven’t been able to read it yet because every spare minute of my time has been given to correcting the proofs of ‘How the Birds Keep Christmas’! There’s an instance of the hardships of an author’s life!”

Mrs. Fetherel’s eye clouded. “Don’t joke, Bella, please. I suppose to

experienced authors there's always something absurd in the nervousness of a new writer, but in my case so much is at stake; I've put so much of myself into this book and I'm so afraid of being misunderstood . . . of being, as it were, in advance of my time . . . like poor Flaubert. . . . I *know* you'll think me ridiculous . . . and if only my own reputation were at stake, I should never give it a thought . . . but the idea of dragging John's name through the mire . . .”

Mrs. Clinch, who had risen and gathered her cloak about her, stood surveying from her genial height her cousin's agitated countenance.

“Why did you use John's name, then?”

“That's another of my difficulties! I *had* to. There would have been no merit in publishing such a book under an assumed name; it would have been an act of moral cowardice. ‘Fast and Loose’ is not an ordinary novel. A writer who dares to show up the hollowness of social conventions must have the courage of her convictions and be willing to accept the consequences of defying society. Can you imagine Ibsen or Tolstoy writing under a false name?” Mrs. Fetherel lifted a tragic eye to her cousin. “You don't know, Bella, how often I've envied you since I began to write. I used to wonder sometimes—you won't mind my saying so?—why, with all your cleverness, you hadn't taken up some more exciting subject than natural history; but I see now how wise you were. Whatever happens, you will never be denounced by the press!”

“Is that what you're afraid of?” asked Mrs. Clinch, as she grasped the bulging umbrella which rested against her chair. “My dear, if I had ever had the good luck to be denounced by the press, my brougham would be waiting at the door for me at this very moment, and I shouldn't have had to ruin this umbrella by using it in the rain. Why, you innocent, if I'd ever felt the slightest aptitude for showing up social conventions, do you suppose I should waste my time writing ‘Nests Ajar’ and ‘How to Smell the Flowers’? There's a fairly

steady demand for pseudo-science and colloquial ornithology, but it's nothing, simply nothing, to the ravenous call for attacks on social institutions—especially by those inside the institutions!”

There was often, to her cousin, a lack of taste in Mrs. Clinch's pleasantries, and on this occasion they seemed more than usually irrelevant.

“‘Fast and Loose’ was not written with the idea of a large sale.”

Mrs. Clinch was unperturbed. “Perhaps that's just as well,” she returned, with a philosophic shrug. “The surprise will be all the pleasanter, I mean. For of course it's going to sell tremendously; especially if you can get the press to denounce it.”

“Bella, how *can* you? I sometimes think you say such things expressly to tease me; and yet I should think you of all women would understand my purpose in writing such a book. It has always seemed to me that the message I had to deliver was not for myself alone, but for all the other women in the world who have felt the hollowness of our social shams, the ignominy of bowing down to the idols of the market, but have lacked either the courage or the power to proclaim their independence; and I have fancied, Bella dear, that, however severely society might punish me for revealing its weaknesses, I could count on the sympathy of those who, like you”—Mrs. Fetherel's voice sank—“have passed through the deep waters.”

Mrs. Clinch gave herself a kind of canine shake, as though to free her ample shoulders from any drop of the element she was supposed to have traversed.

“Oh, call them muddy rather than deep,” she returned; “and you'll find, my dear, that women who've had any wading to do are rather shy of stirring up mud. It sticks—especially on white clothes.”

Mrs. Fetherel lifted an undaunted brow. “I'm not afraid,” she proclaimed; and at the same instant she dropped her teaspoon with a clatter and shrank back into her seat. “There's the bell,” she exclaimed, “and I know it's the Bishop!”

It was in fact the Bishop of Ossining, who, impressively announced

by Mrs. Fetherel's butler, now made an entry that may best be described as not inadequate to the expectations the announcement raised. The Bishop always entered a room well; but, when unannounced, or preceded by a Low Church butler who gave him his surname, his appearance lacked the impressiveness conferred on it by the due specification of his diocesan dignity. The Bishop was very fond of his niece Mrs. Fetherel, and one of the traits he most valued in her was the possession of a butler who knew how to announce a bishop.

Mrs. Clinch was also his niece; but, aside from the fact that she possessed no butler at all, she had laid herself open to her uncle's criticism by writing insignificant little books which had a way of going into five or ten editions, while the fruits of his own episcopal leisure—"The Wail of Jonah" (twenty cantos in blank verse), and "Through a Glass Brightly; or, How to Raise Funds for a Memorial Window"—inexplicably languished on the back shelves of a publisher noted for his dexterity in pushing "devotional goods." Even this indiscretion the Bishop might, however, have condoned, had his niece thought fit to turn to him for support and advice at the painful juncture of her history when, in her own words, it became necessary for her to invite Mr. Clinch to look out for another situation. Mr. Clinch's misconduct was of the kind especially designed by Providence to test the fortitude of a Christian wife and mother, and the Bishop was absolutely distended with seasonable advice and edification; so that when Bella met his tentative exhortations with the curt remark that she preferred to do her own housecleaning unassisted, her uncle's grief at her ingratitude was not untempered with sympathy for Mr. Clinch.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the Bishop's warmest greetings were always reserved for Mrs. Fetherel; and on this occasion Mrs. Clinch thought she detected, in the salutation which fell to her share, a pronounced suggestion that her own presence was superfluous—a hint which she took with her usual imperturbable good humour.

Left alone with the Bishop, Mrs. Fetherel sought the nearest refuge from conversation by offering him a cup of tea. The Bishop accepted with the preoccupied air of a man to whom, for the moment, tea is but a subordinate incident. Mrs. Fetherel's nervousness increased; and knowing that the surest way of distracting attention from one's own affairs is to affect an interest in those of one's companion, she hastily asked if her uncle had come to town on business.

"On business—yes—" said the Bishop in an impressive tone. "I had to see my publisher, who has been behaving rather unsatisfactorily in regard to my last book."

"Ah—your last book?" faltered Mrs. Fetherel, with a sickening sense of her inability to recall the name or nature of the work in question, and a mental vow never again to be caught in such ignorance of a colleague's productions.

" 'Through a Glass Brightly,' " the Bishop explained, with an emphasis which revealed his detection of her predicament. "You may remember that I sent you a copy last Christmas?"

"Of course I do!" Mrs. Fetherel brightened. "It was that delightful story of the poor consumptive girl who had no money, and two little brothers to support—"

"Sisters—idiot sisters—" the Bishop gloomily corrected.

"I mean sisters; and who managed to collect money enough to put up a beautiful memorial window to her—her grandfather, whom she had never seen—"

"But whose sermons had been her chief consolation and support during her long struggle with poverty and disease." The Bishop gave the satisfied sigh of the workman who reviews his completed task. "A touching subject, surely; and I believe I did it justice; at least so my friends assured me."

"Why, yes—I remember there was a splendid review of it in the *Reredos*!" cried Mrs. Fetherel, moved by the incipient instinct of reciprocity.

“Yes—by my dear friend Mrs. Gollinger, whose husband, the late Dean Gollinger, was under very particular obligations to me. Mrs. Gollinger is a woman of rare literary acumen, and her praise of my book was unqualified; but the public wants more highly seasoned fare, and the approval of a thoughtful church-woman carries less weight than the sensational comments of an illiterate journalist.” The Bishop bent a meditative eye on his spotless gaiters. “At the risk of horrifying you, my dear,” he added, with a slight laugh, “I will confide to you that my best chance of a popular success would be to have my book denounced by the press.”

“Denounced?” gasped Mrs. Fetherel. “On what ground?”

“On the ground of immorality.” The Bishop evaded her startled gaze. “Such a thing is inconceivable to you, of course; but I am only repeating what my publisher tells me. If, for instance, a critic could be induced—I mean, if a critic were to be found, who called in question the morality of my heroine in sacrificing her own health and that of her idiot sisters in order to put up a memorial window to her grandfather, it would probably raise a general controversy in the newspapers, and I might count on a sale of ten or fifteen thousand within the next year. If he described her as morbid or decadent, it might even run to twenty thousand; but that is more than I permit myself to hope. In fact I should be satisfied with any general charge of immorality.” The Bishop sighed again. “I need hardly tell you that I am actuated by no mere literary ambition. Those whose opinion I most value have assured me that the book is not without merit; but, though it does not become me to dispute their verdict, I can truly say that my vanity as an author is not at stake. I have, however, a special reason for wishing to increase the circulation of ‘Through a Glass Brightly’; it was written for a purpose—a purpose I have greatly at heart—”

“I know,” cried his niece sympathetically. “The chantry window—?”

“Is still empty, alas! and I had great hopes that, under Providence,

my little book might be the means of filling it. All our wealthy parishioners have given lavishly to the cathedral, and it was for this reason that, in writing 'Through a Glass,' I addressed my appeal more especially to the less well-endowed, hoping by the example of my heroine to stimulate the collection of small sums throughout the entire diocese, and perhaps beyond it. I am sure," the Bishop feelingly concluded, "the book would have a widespread influence if people could only be induced to read it!"

His conclusion touched a fresh thread of association in Mrs. Fetherel's vibrating nerve-centres. "I never thought of that!" she cried.

The Bishop looked at her enquiringly.

"That one's books may not be read at all! How dreadful!" she exclaimed.

He smiled faintly. "I had not forgotten that I was addressing an authoress," he said. "Indeed, I should not have dared to inflict my troubles on any one not of the craft."

Mrs. Fetherel was quivering with the consciousness of her involuntary self-betrayal. "Oh, uncle!" she murmured.

"In fact," the Bishop continued, with a gesture which seemed to brush away her scruples, "I came here partly to speak to you about your novel. 'Fast and Loose,' I think you call it?"

Mrs. Fetherel blushed assentingly.

"And is it out yet?" the Bishop continued.

"It came out about a week ago. But you haven't touched your tea and it must be quite cold. Let me give you another cup."

"My reason for asking," the Bishop went on, with the bland inexorableness with which, in his younger days, he had been known to continue a sermon after the senior warden had looked four times at his watch—"my reason for asking is, that I hoped I might not be too late to induce you to change the title."

Mrs. Fetherel set down the cup she had filled. "The title?" she faltered.

The Bishop raised a reassuring hand. "Don't misunderstand me, dear child; don't for a moment imagine that I take it to be in any way indicative of the contents of the book. I know you too well for that. My first idea was that it had probably been forced on you by an unscrupulous publisher—I know too well to what ignoble compromises one may be driven in such cases! . . ." He paused, as though to give her the opportunity of confirming this conjecture, but she preserved an apprehensive silence, and he went on, as though taking up the second point in his sermon—"Or, again, the name may have taken your fancy without your realising all that it implies to minds more alive than yours to offensive innuendoes. It is—ahem—excessively suggestive, and I hope I am not too late to warn you of the false impression it is likely to produce on the very readers whose approbation you would most value. My friend Mrs. Gollinger, for instance—"

Mrs. Fetherel, as the publication of her novel testified, was in theory a woman of independent views; and if in practice she sometimes failed to live up to her standard, it was rather from an irresistible tendency to adapt herself to her environment than from any conscious lack of moral courage. The Bishop's exordium had excited in her that sense of opposition which such admonitions are apt to provoke; but as he went on she felt herself gradually enclosed in an atmosphere in which her theories vainly gasped for breath. The Bishop had the immense dialectical advantage of invalidating any conclusions at variance with his own by always assuming that his premises were among the necessary laws of thought. This method, combined with the habit of ignoring any classifications but his own, created an element in which the first condition of existence was the immediate adoption of his standpoint; so that his niece, as she listened, seemed to feel Mrs. Gollinger's Mechlin cap spreading its conventual shadow over her rebellious brow and the *Revue de Paris* at her elbow turning into a copy of the *Reredos*. She had meant to assure her uncle that she was quite aware of the significance of the

title she had chosen, that it had been deliberately selected as indicating the subject of her novel, and that the book itself had been written in direct defiance of the class of readers for whose susceptibilities he was alarmed. The words were almost on her lips when the irresistible suggestion conveyed by the Bishop's tone and language deflected them into the apologetic murmur, "Oh, uncle, you mustn't think—I never meant—" How much farther this current of reaction might have carried her the historian is unable to compute, for at this point the door opened and her husband entered the room.

"The first review of your book!" he cried, flourishing a yellow envelope. "My dear Bishop, how lucky you're here!"

Though the trials of married life have been classified and catalogued with exhaustive accuracy, there is one form of conjugal misery which has perhaps received inadequate attention; and that is the suffering of the versatile woman whose husband is not equally adapted to all her moods. Every woman feels for the sister who is compelled to wear a bonnet which does not "go" with her gown; but how much sympathy is given to her whose husband refuses to harmonise with the pose of the moment? Scant justice has, for instance, been done to the misunderstood wife whose husband persists in understanding her; to the submissive helpmate whose taskmaster shuns every opportunity of browbeating her, and to the generous and impulsive being whose bills are paid with philosophic calm. Mrs. Fetherel, as wives go, had been fairly exempt from trials of this nature, for her husband, if undistinguished by pronounced brutality or indifference, had at least the negative merit of being her intellectual inferior. Landscape-gardeners, who are aware of the usefulness of a valley in emphasising the height of a hill, can form an idea of the account to which an accomplished woman may turn such deficiencies; and it need scarcely be said that Mrs. Fetherel had made the most of her opportunities. It was agreeably obvious to every one, Fetherel included, that he was not the man to appreciate such a woman; but there are no limits to man's perversity, and he did his

best to invalidate this advantage by admiring her without pretending to understand her.

What she most suffered from was this fatuous approval: the maddening sense that, however she conducted herself, he would always admire her. Had he belonged to the class whose conversational supplies are drawn from the domestic circle, his wife's name would never have been off his lips; and to Mrs. Fetherel's sensitive perceptions his frequent silences were indicative of the fact that she was his one topic.

It was, in part, the attempt to escape this persistent approbation that had driven Mrs. Fetherel to authorship. She had fancied that even the most infatuated husband might be counted on to resent, at least negatively, an attack on the sanctity of the hearth; and her anticipations were heightened by a sense of the unpardonableness of her act. Mrs. Fetherel's relations with her husband were in fact complicated by an irrepressible tendency to be fond of him; and there was a certain pleasure in the prospect of a situation that justified the most explicit expiation.

These hopes Fetherel's attitude had already defeated. He read the book with enthusiasm, he pressed it on his friends, he sent a copy to his mother; and his very soul now hung on the verdict of the reviewers. It was perhaps this proof of his general inaptitude that made his wife doubly alive to his special defects; so that his inopportune entrance was aggravated by the very sound of his voice and the hopeless aberration of his smile. Nothing, to the observant, is more indicative of a man's character and circumstances than his way of entering a room. The Bishop of Ossining, for instance, brought with him not only an atmosphere of episcopal authority, but an implied opinion on the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures and on the attitude of the Church toward divorce; while the appearance of Mrs. Fetherel's husband produced an immediate impression of domestic felicity. His mere aspect implied that there was a well-filled nursery upstairs; that his wife, if she did not sew on his buttons, at least

superintended the performance of that task; that they both went to church regularly, and that they dined with his mother every Sunday evening punctually at seven o'clock.

All this and more was expressed in the affectionate gesture with which he now raised the yellow envelope above Mrs. Fetherel's clutch; and knowing the uselessness of begging him not to be silly, she said, with a dry despair, "You're boring the Bishop horribly."

Fetherel turned a radiant eye on that dignitary. "She bores us all horribly, doesn't she, sir?" he exulted.

"Have you read it?" said his wife, uncontrollably.

"Read it? Of course not—it's just this minute come. I say, Bishop, you're not going—?"

"Not till I've heard this," said the Bishop, settling himself in his chair with an indulgent smile.

His niece glanced at him despairingly "Don't let John's nonsense detain you," she entreated.

"Detain him? That's good," guffawed Fetherel. "It isn't as long as one of his sermons—won't take me five minutes to read. Here, listen to this, ladies and gentlemen: 'In this age of festering pessimism and decadent depravity, it is no surprise to the nauseated reviewer to open one more volume saturated with the fetid emanations of the sewer—' "

Fetherel, who was not in the habit of reading aloud, paused with a gasp, and the Bishop glanced sharply at his niece, who kept her gaze fixed on the tea-cup she had not yet succeeded in transferring to his hand.

" 'Of the sewer,' " her husband resumed; " 'but his wonder is proportionately great when he lights on a novel as sweetly inoffensive as Paula Fetherel's "Fast and Loose." Mrs. Fetherel is, we believe, a new hand at fiction, and her work reveals frequent traces of inexperience; but these are more than atoned for by her pure fresh view of life and her altogether unfashionable regard for the reader's moral susceptibilities. Let no one be induced by its distinctly

misleading title to forego the enjoyment of this pleasant picture of domestic life, which, in spite of a total lack of force in character-drawing and of consecutiveness in incident, may be described as a distinctly pretty story.' ”

III

It was several weeks later that Mrs. Clinch once more brought the plebeian aroma of heated tram-cars and muddy street-crossings into the violet-scented atmosphere of her cousin's drawing-room.

“Well,” she said, tossing a damp bundle of proof into the corner of a silk-cushioned bergère, “I've read it at last and I'm not so awfully shocked!”

Mrs. Fetherel, who sat near the fire with her head propped on a languid hand, looked up without speaking.

“Mercy, Paula,” said her visitor, “you're ill.”

Mrs. Fetherel shook her head. “I was never better,” she said, mournfully.

“Then may I help myself to tea? Thanks.”

Mrs. Clinch carefully removed her mended glove before taking a buttered tea-cake; then she glanced again at her cousin.

“It's not what I said just now—?” she ventured.

“Just now?”

“About ‘Fast and Loose’? I came to talk it over.”

Mrs. Fetherel sprang to her feet. “I never,” she cried dramatically, “want to hear it mentioned again!”

“Paula!” exclaimed Mrs. Clinch, setting down her cup.

Mrs. Fetherel slowly turned on her an eye brimming with the incommunicable; then, dropping into her seat again, she added, with a tragic laugh: “There's nothing left to say.”

“Nothing—?” faltered Mrs. Clinch, longing for another tea-cake, but feeling the inappropriateness of the impulse in an atmosphere so charged with the portentous. “Do you mean that everything *has* been said?” She looked tentatively at her cousin. “Haven't they been

nice?”

“They’ve been odious—odious—” Mrs. Fetherel burst out, with an ineffectual clutch at her handkerchief. “It’s been perfectly intolerable!”

Mrs. Clinch, philosophically resigning herself to the propriety of taking no more tea, crossed over to her cousin and laid a sympathising hand on that lady’s agitated shoulder.

“It is a bore at first,” she conceded; “but you’ll be surprised to see how soon one gets used to it.”

“I shall—never—get—used to it—” Mrs. Fetherel brokenly declared.

“Have they been so very nasty—all of them?”

“Every one of them!” the novelist sobbed.

“I’m so sorry, dear; it *does* hurt, I know—but hadn’t you rather expected it?”

“Expected it?” cried Mrs. Fetherel, sitting up.

Mrs. Clinch felt her way warily. “I only mean, dear, that I fancied from what you said before the book came out—that you rather expected—that you’d rather discounted—”

“Their recommending it to everybody as a perfectly harmless story?”

“Good gracious! Is *that* what they’ve done?”

Mrs. Fetherel speechlessly nodded.

“Every one of them?”

“Every one.”

“Whew!” said Mrs. Clinch, with an incipient whistle.

“Why, you’ve just said it yourself!” her cousin suddenly reproached her.

“Said what?”

“That you weren’t so *awfully* shocked—”

“I? Oh, well—you see, you’d keyed me up to such a pitch that it wasn’t quite as bad as I expected—”

Mrs. Fetherel lifted a smile steeled for the worst. “Why not say at

once," she suggested, "that it's a distinctly pretty story?"

"They haven't said *that*?"

"They've all said it."

"My poor Paula!"

"Even the Bishop—"

"The Bishop called it a pretty story?"

"He wrote me—I've his letter somewhere. The title rather scared him—he wanted me to change it; but when he'd read the book he wrote that it was all right and that he'd sent several copies to his friends."

"The old hypocrite!" cried Mrs. Clinch. "That was nothing but professional jealousy."

"Do you think so?" cried her cousin, brightening.

"Sure of it, my dear. His own books don't sell, and he knew the quickest way to kill yours was to distribute it through the diocese with his blessing."

"Then you don't really think it's a pretty story?"

"Dear me, no! Not nearly as bad as that—"

"You're so good, Bella—but the reviewers?"

"Oh, the reviewers," Mrs. Clinch jeered. She gazed meditatively at the cold remains of her tea-cake. "Let me see," she said, suddenly; "do you happen to remember if the first review came out in an important paper?"

"Yes—the *Radiator*."

"That's it! I thought so. Then the others simply followed suit: they often do if a big paper sets the pace. Saves a lot of trouble. Now if you could only have got the *Radiator* to denounce you—"

"That's what the Bishop said!" cried Mrs. Fetherel.

"He did?"

"He said his only chance of selling 'Through a Glass Brightly' was to have it denounced on the ground of immorality."

"H'm," said Mrs. Clinch, "I thought he knew a trick or two." She turned an illuminated eye on her cousin. "You ought to get *him* to

denounce 'Fast and Loose'!" she cried.

Mrs. Fetherel looked at her suspiciously. "I suppose every book must stand or fall on its own merits," she said in an unconvinced tone.

"Bosh! That view is as extinct as the post-chaise and the packet-ship—it belongs to the time when people read books. Nobody does that now; the reviewer was the first to set the example, and the public were only too thankful to follow it. At first they read the reviews; now they read only the publishers' extracts from them. Even these are rapidly being replaced by paragraphs borrowed from the vocabulary of commerce. I often have to look twice before I am sure if I am reading a department-store advertisement or the announcement of a new batch of literature. The publishers will soon be having their 'fall and spring openings' and their 'special importations for Horse-Show Week.' But the Bishop is right, of course—nothing helps a book like a rousing attack on its morals; and as the publishers can't exactly proclaim the impropriety of their own wares, the task has to be left to the press or the pulpit."

"The pulpit—?" Mrs. Fetherel mused.

"Why, yes—look at those two novels in England last year—"

Mrs. Fetherel shook her head hopelessly. "There is so much more interest in literature in England than here."

"Well, we've got to make the supply create the demand. The Bishop could run your novel up into the hundred thousands in no time."

"But if he can't make his own sell—"

"My dear, a man can't very well preach against his own writings!"

Mrs. Clinch rose and picked up her proofs.

"I'm awfully sorry for you, Paula dear," she concluded, "but I can't help being thankful that there's no demand for pessimism in the field of natural history. Fancy having to write 'The Fall of a Sparrow,' or 'How the Plants Misbehave'!"

Mrs. Fetherel, driving up to the Grand Central Station one morning about five months later, caught sight of the distinguished novelist, Archer Hynes, hurrying into the waiting-room ahead of her. Hynes, on his side, recognising her brougham, turned back to greet her as the footman opened the carriage door.

"My dear colleague! Is it possible that we are travelling together?"

Mrs. Fetherel blushed with pleasure. Hynes had given her two columns of praise in the *Sunday Meteor*, and she had not yet learned to disguise her gratitude.

"I am going to Ossining," she said smilingly.

"So am I. Why, this is almost as good as an elopement."

"And it will end where elopements ought to—in church."

"In church? You're not going to Ossining to go to church?"

"Why not? There's a special ceremony in the cathedral—the chantry window is to be unveiled."

"The chantry window? How picturesque! What is a chantry? And why do you want to see it unveiled? Are you after copy—doing something in the Huysmans manner? 'La Cathédrale,' eh?"

"Oh, no." Mrs. Fetherel hesitated. "I'm going simply to please my uncle," she said, at last.

"Your uncle?"

"The Bishop, you know." She smiled.

"The Bishop—the Bishop of Ossining? Why, wasn't he the chap who made that ridiculous attack on your book? Is that prehistoric ass your uncle? Upon my soul, I think you're mighty forgiving to travel all the way to Ossining for one of his stained-glass sociables!"

Mrs. Fetherel's smiles flowed into a gentle laugh. "Oh, I've never allowed that to interfere with our friendship. My uncle felt dreadfully about having to speak publicly against my book—it was a great deal harder for him than for me—but he thought it his duty to do so. He has the very highest sense of duty."

"Well," said Hynes, with a shrug, "I don't know that he didn't do

you a good turn. Look at that!”

They were standing near the book-stall and he pointed to a placard surmounting the counter and emblazoned with the conspicuous announcement: “*Fast and Loose*. New Edition with Author’s Portrait. Hundred and Fiftieth Thousand.”

Mrs. Fetherel frowned impatiently. “How absurd! They’ve no right to use my picture as a poster!”

“There’s our train,” said Hynes; and they began to push their way through the crowd surging toward one of the inner doors.

As they stood wedged between circumferent shoulders, Mrs. Fetherel became conscious of the fixed stare of a pretty girl who whispered eagerly to her companion: “Look, Myrtle! That’s Paula Fetherel right behind us—I knew her in a minute!”

“Gracious—where?” cried the other girl, giving her head a twist which swept her Gainsborough plumes across Mrs. Fetherel’s face.

The first speaker’s words had carried beyond her companion’s ear, and a lemon-coloured woman in spectacles, who clutched a copy of the “Journal of Psychology” in one drab-cotton-gloved hand, stretched her disengaged hand across the intervening barrier of humanity.

“Have I the privilege of addressing the distinguished author of ‘Fast and Loose’? If so, let me thank you in the name of the Woman’s Psychological League of Peoria for your magnificent courage in raising the standard of revolt against—”

“You can tell us the rest in the car,” said a fat man, pressing his good-humoured bulk against the speaker’s arm.

Mrs. Fetherel, blushing, embarrassed and happy, slipped into the space produced by this displacement, and a few moments later had taken her seat in the train.

She was a little late, and the other chairs were already filled by a company of elderly ladies and clergymen who seemed to belong to the same party, and were still busy exchanging greetings and settling themselves in their places.

One of the ladies, at Mrs. Fetherel's approach, uttered an exclamation of pleasure and advanced with outstretched hand. "My dear Mrs. Fetherel! I am so delighted to see you here. May I hope you are going to the unveiling of the chantry window? The dear Bishop so hoped that you would do so! But perhaps I ought to introduce myself. I am Mrs. Gollinger"—she lowered her voice expressively—"one of your uncle's oldest friends, one who has stood close to him through all this sad business, and who knows what he suffered when he felt obliged to sacrifice family affection to the call of duty."

Mrs. Fetherel, who had smiled and coloured slightly at the beginning of this speech, received its close with a deprecating gesture.

"Oh, pray don't mention it," she murmured. "I quite understood how my uncle was placed—I bore him no ill will for feeling obliged to preach against my book."

"He understood that, and was so touched by it! He has often told me that it was the hardest task he was ever called upon to perform—and, do you know, he quite feels that this unexpected gift of the chantry window is in some way a return for his courage in preaching that sermon."

Mrs. Fetherel smiled faintly. "Does he feel that?"

"Yes; he really does. When the funds for the window were so mysteriously placed at his disposal, just as he had begun to despair of raising them, he assured me that he could not help connecting the fact with his denunciation of your book."

"Dear uncle!" sighed Mrs. Fetherel. "Did he say that?"

"And now," continued Mrs. Gollinger, with cumulative rapture—"now that you are about to show, by appearing at the ceremony to-day, that there has been no break in your friendly relations, the dear Bishop's happiness will be complete. He was so longing to have you come to the unveiling!"

"He might have counted on me," said Mrs. Fetherel, still smiling.

“Ah, that is so beautifully forgiving of you!” cried Mrs. Gollinger enthusiastically. “But then, the Bishop has always assured me that your real nature was very different from that which—if you will pardon my saying so—seems to be revealed by your brilliant but—er—rather subversive book. ‘If you only knew my niece, dear Mrs. Gollinger,’ he always said, ‘you would see that her novel was written in all innocence of heart;’ and to tell you the truth, when I first read the book I didn’t think it so very, *very* shocking. It wasn’t till the dear Bishop had explained to me—but, dear me, I mustn’t take up your time in this way when so many others are anxious to have a word with you.”

Mrs. Fetherel glanced at her in surprise, and Mrs. Gollinger continued with a playful smile: “You forget that your face is familiar to thousands whom you have never seen. We all recognised you the moment you entered the train, and my friends here are so eager to make your acquaintance—even those”—her smile deepened—“who thought the dear Bishop not *quite unjustified* in his attack on your remarkable novel.”

V

A religious light filled the chantry of Ossining Cathedral, filtering through the linen curtain which veiled the central window and mingling with the blaze of tapers on the richly adorned altar.

In this devout atmosphere, agreeably laden with the incense-like aroma of Easter lilies and forced lilacs, Mrs. Fetherel knelt with a sense of luxurious satisfaction. Beside her sat Archer Hynes, who had remembered that there was to be a church scene in his next novel and that his impressions of the devotional environment needed refreshing. Mrs. Fetherel was very happy. She was conscious that her entrance had sent a thrill through the female devotees who packed the chantry, and she had humour enough to enjoy the thought that, but for the good Bishop’s denunciation of her book, the heads of his flock would not have been turned so eagerly in her direction.

Moreover, as she entered she had caught sight of a society reporter, and she knew that her presence, and the fact that she was accompanied by Hynes, would be conspicuously proclaimed in the morning papers. All these evidences of the success of her handiwork might have turned a calmer head than Mrs. Fetherel's; and though she had now learned to dissemble her gratification, it still filled her inwardly with a delightful glow.

The Bishop was somewhat late in appearing, and she employed the interval in meditating on the plot of her next novel, which was already partly sketched out, but for which she had been unable to find a satisfactory dénouement. By a not uncommon process of ratiocination, Mrs. Fetherel's success had convinced her of her vocation. She was sure now that it was her duty to lay bare the secret plague-spots of society, and she was resolved that there should be no doubt as to the purpose of her new book. Experience had shown her that where she had fancied she was calling a spade a spade she had in fact been alluding in guarded terms to the drawing-room shovel. She was determined not to repeat the same mistake, and she flattered herself that her coming novel would not need an episcopal denunciation to insure its sale, however likely it was to receive this crowning evidence of success.

She had reached this point in her meditations when the choir burst into song and the ceremony of the unveiling began. The Bishop, almost always felicitous in his addresses to the fair sex, was never more so than when he was celebrating the triumph of one of his cherished purposes. There was a peculiar mixture of Christian humility and episcopal exultation in the manner with which he called attention to the Creator's promptness in responding to his demand for funds, and he had never been more happily inspired than in eulogising the mysterious gift of the chantry window.

Though no hint of the donor's identity had been allowed to escape him, it was generally understood that the Bishop knew who had given the window, and the congregation awaited in a flutter of

suspense the possible announcement of a name. None came, however, though the Bishop deliciously titillated the curiosity of his flock by circling ever closer about the interesting secret. He would not disguise from them, he said, that the heart which had divined his inmost wish had been a woman's—is it not to woman's intuitions that more than half the happiness of earth is owing? What man is obliged to learn by the laborious process of experience, woman's wondrous instinct tells her at a glance; and so it had been with this cherished scheme, this un hoped-for completion of their beautiful chantry. So much, at least, he was allowed to reveal; and indeed, had he not done so, the window itself would have spoken for him, since the first glance at its touching subject and exquisite design would show it to have originated in a woman's heart. This tribute to the sex was received with an audible sigh of contentment, and the Bishop, always stimulated by such evidence of his sway over his hearers, took up his theme with gathering eloquence.

Yes—a woman's heart had planned the gift, a woman's hand had executed it, and, might he add, without too far withdrawing the veil in which Christian beneficence ever loved to drape its acts—might he add that, under Providence, a book, a simple book, a mere tale, in fact, had had its share in the good work for which they were assembled to give thanks?

At this unexpected announcement, a ripple of excitement ran through the assemblage, and more than one head was abruptly turned in the direction of Mrs. Fetherel, who sat listening in an agony of wonder and confusion. It did not escape the observant novelist at her side that she drew down her veil to conceal an uncontrollable blush, and this evidence of dismay caused him to fix an attentive gaze on her, while from her seat across the aisle Mrs. Gollinger sent a smile of unctuous approval.

“A book—a simple book—” the Bishop's voice went on above this flutter of mingled emotions. “What is a book? Only a few pages and a little ink—and yet one of the mightiest instruments which

Providence has devised for shaping the destinies of man . . . one of the most powerful influences for good or evil which the Creator has placed in the hands of his creatures. . . .”

The air seemed intolerably close to Mrs. Fetherel, and she drew out her scent-bottle, and then thrust it hurriedly away, conscious that she was still the centre of an unenviable attention. And all the while the Bishop’s voice droned on . . .

“And of all forms of literature, fiction is doubtless that which has exercised the greatest sway, for good or ill, over the passions and imagination of the masses. Yes, my friends, I am the first to acknowledge it—no sermon, however eloquent, no theological treatise, however learned and convincing, has ever inflamed the heart and imagination like a novel—a simple novel. Incalculable is the power exercised over humanity by the great magicians of the pen—a power ever enlarging its boundaries and increasing its responsibilities as popular education multiplies the number of readers . . . Yes, it is the novelist’s hand which can pour balm on countless human sufferings, or inoculate mankind with the festering poison of a corrupt imagination. . . .”

Mrs. Fetherel had turned white, and her eyes were fixed with a blind stare of anger on the large-sleeved figure in the centre of the chancel.

“And too often, alas, it is the poison and not the balm which the unscrupulous hand of genius proffers to its unsuspecting readers. But, my friends, why should I continue? None know better than an assemblage of Christian women, such as I am now addressing, the beneficent or baleful influences of modern fiction; and so, when I say that this beautiful chantry window of ours owes its existence in part to the romancer’s pen”—the Bishop paused, and bending forward, seemed to seek a certain face among the countenances eagerly addressed to his—“when I say that this pen, which for personal reasons it does not become me to celebrate unduly—”

Mrs. Fetherel at this point half rose, pushing back her chair, which

scraped loudly over the marble floor; but Hynes involuntarily laid a warning hand on her arm, and she sank down with a confused murmur about the heat.

“When I confess that this pen, which for once at least has proved itself so much mightier than the sword, is that which was inspired to trace the simple narrative of ‘Through a Glass Brightly’— Mrs. Fetherel looked up with a gasp of mingled relief and anger—“when I tell you, my dear friends, that it was your Bishop’s own work which first roused the mind of one of his flock to the crying need of a chantry window, I think you will admit that I am justified in celebrating the triumphs of the pen, even though it be the modest instrument which your own Bishop wields.”

The Bishop paused impressively, and a faint gasp of surprise and disappointment was audible throughout the chantry. Something very different from this conclusion had been expected, and even Mrs. Gollinger’s lips curled with a slightly ironic smile. But Archer Hynes’s attention was chiefly reserved for Mrs. Fetherel, whose face had changed with astonishing rapidity from surprise to annoyance, from annoyance to relief, and then back again to something very like indignation.

The address concluded, the actual ceremony of the unveiling was about to take place, and the attention of the congregation soon reverted to the chancel, where the choir had grouped themselves beneath the veiled window, prepared to burst into a chant of praise as the Bishop drew back the hanging. The moment was an impressive one, and every eye was fixed on the curtain. Even Hynes’s gaze strayed to it for a moment, but soon returned to his neighbour’s face; and then he perceived that Mrs. Fetherel, alone of all the persons present, was not looking at the window. Her eyes were fixed in an indignant stare on the Bishop; a flush of anger burned becomingly under her veil, and her hands nervously crumpled the beautifully printed programme of the ceremony.

Hynes broke into a smile of comprehension. He glanced at the

Bishop, and back at the Bishop's niece; then, as the episcopal hand was solemnly raised to draw back the curtain, he bent and whispered in Mrs. Fetherel's ear:

“Why, you gave it yourself! You wonderful woman, of course you gave it yourself!”

Mrs. Fetherel raised her eyes to his with a start. Her blush deepened and her lips shaped a hasty “No”; but the denial was deflected into the indignant murmur—“It wasn't *his* silly book that did it, anyhow!”

The Lady's Maid's Bell

IT WAS the autumn after I had the typhoid. I'd been three months in hospital, and when I came out I looked so weak and tottery that the two or three ladies I applied to were afraid to engage me. Most of my money was gone, and after I'd boarded for two months, hanging about the employment-agencies, and answering any advertisement that looked any way respectable, I pretty nearly lost heart, for fretting hadn't made me fatter, and I didn't see why my luck should ever turn. It did though—or I thought so at the time. A Mrs. Railton, a friend of the lady that first brought me out to the States, met me one day and stopped to speak to me: she was one that had always a friendly way with her. She asked me what ailed me to look so white, and when I told her, "Why, Hartley," says she, "I believe I've got the very place for you. Come in to-morrow and we'll talk about it."

The next day, when I called, she told me the lady she'd in mind was a niece of hers, a Mrs. Brympton, a youngish lady, but something of an invalid, who lived all the year round at her country-place on the Hudson, owing to not being able to stand the fatigue of town life.

"Now, Hartley," Mrs. Railton said, in that cheery way that always made me feel things must be going to take a turn for the better—"now understand me; it's not a cheerful place I'm sending you to. The house is big and gloomy; my niece is nervous, vapourish; her husband—well, he's generally away; and the two children are dead. A year ago I would as soon have thought of shutting a rosy active girl like you into a vault; but you're not particularly brisk yourself just now, are you? and a quiet place, with country air and wholesome

food and early hours, ought to be the very thing for you. Don't mistake me," she added, for I suppose I looked a trifle downcast; "you may find it dull but you won't be unhappy. My niece is an angel. Her former maid, who died last spring, had been with her twenty years and worshipped the ground she walked on. She's a kind mistress to all, and where the mistress is kind, as you know, the servants are generally good-humoured, so you'll probably get on well enough with the rest of the household. And you're the very woman I want for my niece: quiet, well-mannered, and educated above your station. You read aloud well, I think? That's a good thing; my niece likes to be read to. She wants a maid that can be something of a companion: her last was, and I can't say how she misses her. It's a lonely life . . . Well, have you decided?"

"Why, ma'am," I said, "I'm not afraid of solitude."

"Well, then, go; my niece will take you on my recommendation. I'll telegraph her at once and you can take the afternoon train. She has no one to wait on her at present, and I don't want you to lose any time."

I was ready enough to start, yet something in me hung back; and to gain time I asked, "And the gentleman, ma'am?"

"The gentleman's almost always away, I tell you," said Mrs. Railton, quick-like—"and when he's there," says she suddenly, "you've only to keep out of his way."

I took the afternoon train and got out at D—— station at about four o'clock. A groom in a dog-cart was waiting, and we drove off at a smart pace. It was a dull October day, with rain hanging close overhead, and by the time we turned into Brympton Place woods the daylight was almost gone. The drive wound through the woods for a mile or two, and came out on a gravel court shut in with thickets of tall black-looking shrubs. There were no lights in the windows, and the house *did* look a bit gloomy.

I had asked no questions of the groom, for I never was one to get my notion of new masters from their other servants: I prefer to wait

and see for myself. But I could tell by the look of everything that I had got into the right kind of house, and that things were done handsomely. A pleasant-faced cook met me at the back door and called the house-maid to show me up to my room. "You'll see madam later," she said. "Mrs. Brympton has a visitor."

I hadn't fancied Mrs. Brympton was a lady to have many visitors, and somehow the words cheered me. I followed the house-maid upstairs, and saw, through a door on the upper landing, that the main part of the house seemed well furnished, with dark panelling and a number of old portraits. Another flight of stairs led us up to the servants' wing. It was almost dark now, and the house-maid excused herself for not having brought a light. "But there's matches in your room," she said, "and if you go careful you'll be all right. Mind the step at the end of the passage. Your room is just beyond."

I looked ahead as she spoke, and half-way down the passage I saw a woman standing. She drew back into a doorway as we passed and the house-maid didn't appear to notice her. She was a thin woman with a white face, and a darkish stuff gown and apron. I took her for the housekeeper and thought it odd that she didn't speak, but just gave me a long look as she went by. My room opened into a square hall at the end of the passage. Facing my door was another which stood open: the house-maid exclaimed when she saw it:

"There—Mrs. Blinder's left that door open again!" said she, closing it.

"Is Mrs. Blinder the housekeeper?"

"There's no housekeeper: Mrs. Blinder's the cook."

"And is that her room?"

"Laws, no," said the house-maid, cross-like. "That's nobody's room. It's empty, I mean, and the door hadn't ought to be open. Mrs. Brympton wants it kept locked."

She opened my door and led me into a neat room, nicely furnished, with a picture or two on the walls; and having lit a candle she took leave, telling me that the servants'-hall tea was at six, and

that Mrs. Brympton would see me afterward.

I found them a pleasant-spoken set in the servants' hall, and by what they let fall I gathered that, as Mrs. Railton had said, Mrs. Brympton was the kindest of ladies; but I didn't take much notice of their talk, for I was watching to see the pale woman in the dark gown come in. She didn't show herself, however, and I wondered if she ate apart; but if she wasn't the housekeeper, why should she? Suddenly it struck me that she might be a trained nurse, and in that case her meals would of course be served in her room. If Mrs. Brympton was an invalid it was likely enough she had a nurse. The idea annoyed me, I own, for they're not always the easiest to get on with, and if I'd known I shouldn't have taken the place. But there I was and there was no use pulling a long face over it; and not being one to ask questions I waited to see what would turn up.

When tea was over the house-maid said to the footman: "Has Mr. Ranford gone?" and when he said yes, she told me to come up with her to Mrs. Brympton.

Mrs. Brympton was lying down in her bedroom. Her lounge stood near the fire and beside it was a shaded lamp. She was a delicate-looking lady, but when she smiled I felt there was nothing I wouldn't do for her. She spoke very pleasantly, in a low voice, asking me my name and age and so on, and if I had everything I wanted, and if I wasn't afraid of feeling lonely in the country.

"Not with you I wouldn't be, madam," I said, and the words surprised me when I'd spoken them, for I'm not an impulsive person; but it was just as if I'd thought aloud.

She seemed pleased at that, and said she hoped I'd continue in the same mind; then she gave me a few directions about her toilet, and said Agnes the house-maid would show me next morning where things were kept.

"I am tired to-night, and shall dine upstairs," she said. "Agnes will bring me my tray, that you may have time to unpack and settle yourself; and later you may come and undress me."

“Very well, ma’am,” I said. “You’ll ring, I suppose?”

I thought she looked odd.

“No—Agnes will fetch you,” says she quickly, and took up her book again.

Well—that was certainly strange: a lady’s-maid having to be fetched by the house-maid whenever her lady wanted her! I wondered if there were no bells in the house; but the next day I satisfied myself that there was one in every room, and a special one ringing from my mistress’s room to mine; and after that it did strike me as queer that, whenever Mrs. Brympton wanted anything, she rang for Agnes, who had to walk the whole length of the servants’ wing to call me.

But that wasn’t the only queer thing in the house. The very next day I found out that Mrs. Brympton had no nurse; and then I asked Agnes about the woman I had seen in the passage the afternoon before. Agnes said she had seen no one, and I saw that she thought I was dreaming. To be sure, it was dusk when we went down the passage, and she had excused herself for not bringing a light; but I had seen the woman plain enough to know her again if we should meet. I decided that she must have been a friend of the cook’s, or of one of the other women-servants; perhaps she had come down from town for a night’s visit, and the servants wanted it kept secret. Some ladies are very stiff about having their servants’ friends in the house overnight. At any rate, I made up my mind to ask no more questions.

In a day or two another odd thing happened. I was chatting one afternoon with Mrs. Blinder, who was a friendly disposed woman, and had been longer in the house than the other servants, and she asked me if I was quite comfortable and had everything I needed. I said I had no fault to find with my place or with my mistress, but I thought it odd that in so large a house there was no sewing-room for the lady’s maid.

“Why,” says she, “there is one: the room you’re in is the old sewing-room.”

“Oh,” said I; “and where did the other lady’s maid sleep?”

At that she grew confused, and said hurriedly that the servants’ rooms had all been changed about last year, and she didn’t rightly remember.

That struck me as peculiar, but I went on as if I hadn’t noticed: “Well, there’s a vacant room opposite mine, and I mean to ask Mrs. Brympton if I mayn’t use that as a sewing-room.”

To my astonishment, Mrs. Blinder went white, and gave my hand a kind of squeeze. “Don’t do that, my dear,” said she, trembling-like. “To tell you the truth, that was Emma Saxon’s room, and my mistress has kept it closed ever since her death.”

“And who was Emma Saxon?”

“Mrs. Brympton’s former maid.”

“The one that was with her so many years?” said I, remembering what Mrs. Railton had told me.

Mrs. Blinder nodded.

“What sort of woman was she?”

“No better walked the earth,” said Mrs. Blinder. “My mistress loved her like a sister.”

“But I mean—what did she look like?”

Mrs. Blinder got up and gave me a kind of angry stare. “I’m no great hand at describing,” she said; “and I believe my pastry’s rising.” And she walked off into the kitchen and shut the door after her.

II

I had been near a week at Brympton before I saw my master. Word came that he was arriving one afternoon, and a change passed over the whole household. It was plain that nobody loved him below stairs. Mrs. Blinder took uncommon care with the dinner that night, but she snapped at the kitchen-maid in a way quite unusual with her; and Mr. Wace, the butler, a serious, slow-spoken man, went about his duties as if he’d been getting ready for a funeral. He was a great Bible-reader, Mr. Wace was, and had a beautiful assortment of texts

at his command; but that day he used such dreadful language, that I was about to leave the table, when he assured me it was all out of Isaiah; and I noticed that whenever the master came Mr. Wace took to the prophets.

About seven, Agnes called me to my mistress's room; and there I found Mr. Brympton. He was standing on the hearth; a big fair bull-necked man, with a red face and little bad-tempered blue eyes: the kind of man a young simpleton might have thought handsome, and would have been like to pay dear for thinking it.

He swung about when I came in, and looked me over in a trice. I knew what the look meant, from having experienced it once or twice in my former places. Then he turned his back on me, and went on talking to his wife; and I knew what *that* meant, too. I was not the kind of morsel he was after. The typhoid had served me well enough in one way: it kept that kind of gentleman at arm's-length.

"This is my new maid, Hartley," says Mrs. Brympton in her kind voice; and he nodded and went on with what he was saying.

In a minute or two he went off, and left my mistress to dress for dinner, and I noticed as I waited on her that she was white, and chill to the touch.

Mr. Brympton took himself off the next morning, and the whole house drew a long breath when he drove away. As for my mistress, she put on her hat and furs (for it was a fine winter morning) and went out for a walk in the gardens, coming back quite fresh and rosy, so that for a minute, before her colour faded, I could guess what a pretty young lady she must have been, and not so long ago, either.

She had met Mr. Ranford in the grounds, and the two came back together, I remember, smiling and talking as they walked along the terrace under my window. That was the first time I saw Mr. Ranford, though I had often heard his name mentioned in the hall. He was a neighbour, it appeared, living a mile or two beyond Brympton, at the end of the village; and as he was in the habit of spending his winters in the country he was almost the only company my mistress had at

that season. He was a slight tall gentleman of about thirty, and I thought him rather melancholy-looking till I saw his smile, which had a kind of surprise in it, like the first warm day in spring. He was a great reader, I heard, like my mistress, and the two were for ever borrowing books of one another, and sometimes (Mr. Wace told me) he would read aloud to Mrs. Brympton by the hour, in the big dark library where she sat in the winter afternoons. The servants all liked him, and perhaps that's more of a compliment than the masters suspect. He had a friendly word for every one of us, and we were all glad to think that Mrs. Brympton had a pleasant companionable gentleman like that to keep her company when the master was away. Mr. Ranford seemed on excellent terms with Mr. Brympton too; though I couldn't but wonder that two gentlemen so unlike each other should be so friendly. But then I knew how the real quality can keep their feelings to themselves.

As for Mr. Brympton, he came and went, never staying more than a day or two, cursing the dulness and the solitude, grumbling at everything, and (as I soon found out) drinking a deal more than was good for him. After Mrs. Brympton left the table he would sit half the night over the old Brympton port and madeira, and once, as I was leaving my mistress's room rather later than usual, I met him coming up the stairs in such a state that I turned sick to think of what some ladies have to endure and hold their tongues about.

The servants said very little about their master; but from what they let drop I could see it had been an unhappy match from the beginning. Mr. Brympton was coarse, loud and pleasure-loving; my mistress quiet, retiring, and perhaps a trifle cold. Not that she was not always pleasant-spoken to him: I thought her wonderfully forbearing; but to a gentleman as free as Mr. Brympton I daresay she seemed a little offish.

Well, things went on quietly for several weeks. My mistress was kind, my duties were light, and I got on well with the other servants. In short, I had nothing to complain of; yet there was always a weight

on me. I can't say why it was so, but I know it was not the loneliness that I felt. I soon got used to that; and being still languid from the fever, I was thankful for the quiet and the good country air. Nevertheless, I was never quite easy in my mind. My mistress, knowing I had been ill, insisted that I should take my walk regular, and often invented errands for me:—a yard of ribbon to be fetched from the village, a letter posted, or a book returned to Mr. Ranford. As soon as I was out of doors my spirits rose, and I looked forward to my walks through the bare moist-smelling woods; but the moment I caught sight of the house again my heart dropped down like a stone in a well. It was not a gloomy house exactly, yet I never entered it but a feeling of gloom came over me.

Mrs. Brympton seldom went out in winter; only on the finest days did she walk an hour at noon on the south terrace. Excepting Mr. Ranford, we had no visitors but the doctor, who drove over from D — about once a week. He sent for me once or twice to give me some trifling direction about my mistress, and though he never told me what her illness was, I thought, from a waxy look she had now and then of a morning, that it might be the heart that ailed her. The season was soft and unwholesome, and in January we had a long spell of rain. That was a sore trial to me, I own, for I couldn't go out, and sitting over my sewing all day, listening to the drip, drip of the eaves, I grew so nervous that the least sound made me jump. Somehow, the thought of that locked room across the passage began to weigh on me. Once or twice, in the long rainy nights, I fancied I heard noises there; but that was nonsense, of course, and the daylight drove such notions out of my head. Well, one morning Mrs. Brympton gave me quite a start of pleasure by telling me she wished me to go to town for some shopping. I hadn't known till then how low my spirits had fallen. I set off in high glee, and my first sight of the crowded streets and the cheerful-looking shops quite took me out of myself. Toward afternoon, however, the noise and confusion began to tire me, and I was actually looking forward to the quiet of

Brympton, and thinking how I should enjoy the drive home through the dark woods, when I ran across an old acquaintance, a maid I had once been in service with. We had lost sight of each other for a number of years, and I had to stop and tell her what had happened to me in the interval. When I mentioned where I was living she rolled up her eyes and pulled a long face.

“What! The Mrs. Brympton that lives all the year at her place on the Hudson? My dear, you won’t stay there three months.”

“Oh, but I don’t mind the country,” says I, offended somehow at her tone. “Since the fever I’m glad to be quiet.”

She shook her head. “It’s not the country I’m thinking of. All I know is she’s had four maids in the last six months, and the last one, who was a friend of mine, told me nobody could stay in the house.”

“Did she say why?” I asked.

“No—she wouldn’t give me her reason. But she says to me, *Mrs. Ansey*, she says, *if ever a young woman as you know of thinks of going there, you tell her it’s not worth while to unpack her boxes.*”

“Is she young and handsome?” said I, thinking of Mr. Brympton.

“Not her! She’s the kind that mothers engage when they’ve gay young gentlemen at college.”

Well, though I knew the woman was an idle gossip, the words stuck in my head, and my heart sank lower than ever as I drove up to Brympton in the dusk. There *was* something about the house—I was sure of it now . . .

When I went in to tea I heard that Mr. Brympton had arrived, and I saw at a glance that there had been a disturbance of some kind. Mrs. Blinder’s hand shook so that she could hardly pour the tea, and Mr. Wace quoted the most dreadful texts full of brimstone. Nobody said a word to me then, but when I went up to my room Mrs. Blinder followed me.

“Oh, my dear,” says she, taking my hand, “I’m so glad and thankful you’ve come back to us!”

That struck me, as you may imagine. “Why,” said I, “did you think

I was leaving for good?"

"No, no, to be sure," said she, a little confused, "but I can't a-bear to have madam left alone for a day even." She pressed my hand hard, and, "Oh, Miss Hartley," says she, "be good to your mistress, as you're a Christian woman." And with that she hurried away, and left me staring.

A moment later Agnes called me to Mrs. Brympton. Hearing Mr. Brympton's voice in her room, I went round by the dressing-room, thinking I would lay out her dinner-gown before going in. The dressing-room is a large room with a window over the portico that looks toward the gardens. Mr. Brympton's apartments are beyond. When I went in, the door into the bedroom was ajar, and I heard Mr. Brympton saying angrily:—"One would suppose he was the only person fit for you to talk to."

"I don't have many visitors in winter," Mrs. Brympton answered quietly.

"You have *me*!" he flung at her, sneeringly.

"You are here so seldom," said she.

"Well—whose fault is that? You make the place about as lively as the family vault—"

With that I rattled the toilet-things, to give my mistress warning, and she rose and called me in.

The two dined alone, as usual, and I knew by Mr. Wace's manner at supper that things must be going badly. He quoted the prophets something terrible, and worked on the kitchen-maid so that she declared she wouldn't go down alone to put the cold meat in the ice-box. I felt nervous myself, and after I had put my mistress to bed I was half-tempted to go down again and persuade Mrs. Blinder to sit up awhile over a game of cards. But I heard her door closing for the night and so I went on to my own room. The rain had begun again, and the drip, drip, drip seemed to be dropping into my brain. I lay awake listening to it, and turning over what my friend in town had said. What puzzled me was that it was always the maids who left . . .

After a while I slept; but suddenly a loud noise wakened me. My bell had rung. I sat up, terrified by the unusual sound, which seemed to go on jangling through the darkness. My hands shook so that I couldn't find the matches. At length I struck a light and jumped out of bed. I began to think I must have been dreaming; but I looked at the bell against the wall, and there was the little hammer still quivering.

I was just beginning to huddle on my clothes when I heard another sound. This time it was the door of the locked room opposite mine softly opening and closing. I heard the sound distinctly, and it frightened me so that I stood stock still. Then I heard a footstep hurrying down the passage toward the main house. The floor being carpeted, the sound was very faint, but I was quite sure it was a woman's step. I turned cold with the thought of it, and for a minute to two I durstn't breathe or move. Then I came to my senses.

"Alice Hartley," says I to myself, "someone left that room just now and ran down the passage ahead of you. The idea isn't pleasant, but you may as well face it. Your mistress has rung for you, and to answer her bell you've got to go the way that other woman has gone."

Well—I did it. I never walked faster in my life, yet I thought I should never get to the end of the passage or reach Mrs. Brympton's room. On the way I heard nothing and saw nothing: all was dark and quiet as the grave. When I reached my mistress's door the silence was so deep that I began to think I must be dreaming, and was half-minded to turn back. Then a panic seized me, and I knocked.

There was no answer, and I knocked again, loudly. To my astonishment the door was opened by Mr. Brympton. He started back when he saw me, and in the light of my candle his face looked red and savage.

"You?" he said, in a queer voice. "*How many of you are there, in God's name?*"

At that I felt the ground give under me; but I said to myself that he

had been drinking, and answered as steadily as I could: "May I go in, sir? Mrs. Brympton has rung for me."

"You may all go in, for what I care," says he, and, pushing by me, walked down the hall to his own bedroom. I looked after him as he went, and to my surprise I saw that he walked as straight as a sober man.

I found my mistress lying very weak and still, but she forced a smile when she saw me, and signed to me to pour out some drops for her. After that she lay without speaking, her breath coming quick, and her eyes closed. Suddenly she groped out with her hand, and "*Emma*," says she, faintly.

"It's Hartley, madam," I said. "Do you want anything?"

She opened her eyes wide and gave me a startled look.

"I was dreaming," she said. "You may go, now, Hartley, and thank you kindly. I'm quite well again, you see." And she turned her face away from me.

III

There was no more sleep for me that night, and I was thankful when daylight came.

Soon afterward, Agnes called me to Mrs. Brympton. I was afraid she was ill again, for she seldom sent for me before nine, but I found her sitting up in bed, pale and drawn-looking, but quite herself.

"Hartley," says she quickly, "will you put on your things at once and go down to the village for me? I want this prescription made up—" here she hesitated a minute and blushed—"and I should like you to be back again before Mr. Brympton is up."

"Certainly, madam," I said.

"And—stay a moment—" she called me back as if an idea had just struck her—"while you're waiting for the mixture, you'll have time to go on to Mr. Ranford's with this note."

It was a two-mile walk to the village, and on my way I had time to turn things over in my mind. It struck me as peculiar that my

mistress should wish the prescription made up without Mr. Brympton's knowledge; and, putting this together with the scene of the night before, and with much else that I had noticed and suspected, I began to wonder if the poor lady was weary of her life, and had come to the mad resolve of ending it. The idea took such hold on me that I reached the village on a run, and dropped breathless into a chair before the chemist's counter. The good man, who was just taking down his shutters, stared at me so hard that it brought me to myself.

"Mr. Limmel," I says, trying to speak indifferent, "will you run your eye over this, and tell me if it's quite right?" He put on his spectacles and studied the prescription.

"Why, it's one of Dr. Walton's," says he. "What should be wrong with it?"

"Well—is it dangerous to take?"

"Dangerous—how do you mean?"

I could have shaken the man for his stupidity.

"I mean—if a person was to take too much of it—by mistake of course—" says I, my heart in my throat.

"Lord bless you, no. It's only lime-water. You might feed it to a baby by the bottleful."

I gave a great sigh of relief and hurried on to Mr. Ranford's. But on the way another thought struck me. If there was nothing to conceal about my visit to the chemist's, was it my other errand that Mrs. Brympton wished me to keep private? Somehow, that thought frightened me worse than the other. Yet the two gentlemen seemed fast friends, and I would have staked my head on my mistress's goodness. I felt ashamed of my suspicions, and concluded that I was still disturbed by the strange events of the night. I left the note at Mr. Ranford's, and hurrying back to Brympton, slipped in by a side door without being seen, as I thought.

An hour later, however, as I was carrying in my mistress's breakfast, I was stopped in the hall by Mr. Brympton.

"What were you doing out so early?" he says, looking hard at me.

"Early—me, sir?" I said, in a tremble.

"Come, come," he says, an angry red spot coming out on his forehead, "didn't I see you scuttling home through the shrubbery an hour or more ago?"

I'm a truthful woman by nature, but at that a lie popped out ready-made. "No, sir, you didn't," said I and looked straight back at him.

He shrugged his shoulders and gave a sullen laugh. "I suppose you think I was drunk last night?" he asked suddenly.

"No, sir, I don't," I answered, this time truthfully enough.

He turned away with another shrug. "A pretty notion my servants have of me!" I heard him mutter as he walked off.

Not till I had settled down to my afternoon's sewing did I realise how the events of the night had shaken me. I couldn't pass that locked door without a shiver. I knew I had heard someone come out of it, and walk down the passage ahead of me. I thought of speaking to Mrs. Blinder or to Mr. Wace, the only two in the house who appeared to have an inkling of what was going on, but I had a feeling that if I questioned them they would deny everything, and that I might learn more by holding my tongue and keeping my eyes open. The idea of spending another night opposite the locked room sickened me, and once I was seized with the notion of packing my trunk and taking the first train to town; but it wasn't in me to throw over a kind mistress in that manner, and I tried to go on with my sewing as if nothing had happened. I hadn't worked ten minutes before the sewing machine broke down. It was one I had found in the house, a good machine but a trifle out of order: Mrs. Blinder said it had never been used since Emma Saxon's death. I stopped to see what was wrong, and as I was working at the machine a drawer which I had never been able to open slid forward and a photograph fell out. I picked it up and sat looking at it in a maze. It was a woman's likeness, and I knew I had seen the face somewhere—the eyes had an asking look that I had felt on me before. And suddenly I

remembered the pale woman in the passage.

I stood up, cold all over, and ran out of the room. My heart seemed to be thumping in the top of my head, and I felt as if I should never get away from the look in those eyes. I went straight to Mrs. Blinder. She was taking her afternoon nap, and sat up with a jump when I came in.

"Mrs. Blinder," said I, "who is that?" And I held out the photograph.

She rubbed her eyes and stared.

"Why, Emma Saxon," says she. "Where did you find it?"

I looked hard at her for a minute. "Mrs. Blinder," I said, "I've seen that face before."

Mrs. Blinder got up and walked over to the looking-glass. "Dear me! I must have been asleep," she says. "My front is all over one ear. And now do run along, Miss Hartley, dear, for I hear the clock striking four, and I must go down this very minute and put on the Virginia ham for Mr. Brympton's dinner."

IV

To all appearances, things went on as usual for a week or two. The only difference was that Mr. Brympton stayed on, instead of going off as he usually did, and that Mr. Ranford never showed himself. I heard Mr. Brympton remark on this one afternoon when he was sitting in my mistress's room before dinner:

"Where's Ranford?" says he. "He hasn't been near the house for a week. Does he keep away because I'm here?"

Mrs. Brympton spoke so low that I couldn't catch her answer.

"Well," he went on, "two's company and three's trumpery; I'm sorry to be in Ranford's way, and I suppose I shall have to take myself off again in a day or two and give him a show." And he laughed at his own joke.

The very next day, as it happened, Mr. Ranford called. The footman said the three were very merry over their tea in the library,

and Mr. Brympton strolled down to the gate with Mr. Ranford when he left.

I have said that things went on as usual; and so they did with the rest of the household; but as for myself, I had never been the same since the night my bell had rung. Night after night I used to lie awake, listening for it to ring again, and for the door of the locked room to open stealthily. But the bell never rang, and I heard no sound across the passage. At last the silence began to be more dreadful to me than the most mysterious sounds. I felt that *someone* was cowering there, behind the locked door, watching and listening as I watched and listened, and I could almost have cried out, "Whoever you are, come out and let me see you face to face, but don't lurk there and spy on me in the darkness!"

Feeling as I did, you may wonder I didn't give warning. Once I very nearly did so; but at the last moment something held me back. Whether it was compassion for my mistress, who had grown more and more dependent on me, or unwillingness to try a new place, or some other feeling that I couldn't put a name to, I lingered on as if spell-bound, though every night was dreadful to me, and the days but little better.

For one thing, I didn't like Mrs. Brympton's looks. She had never been the same since that night, no more than I had. I thought she would brighten up after Mr. Brympton left, but though she seemed easier in her mind, her spirits didn't revive, nor her strength either. She had grown attached to me, and seemed to like to have me about; and Agnes told me one day that, since Emma Saxon's death, I was the only maid her mistress had taken to. This gave me a warm feeling for the poor lady, though after all there was little I could do to help her.

After Mr. Brympton's departure, Mr. Ranford took to coming again, though less often than formerly. I met him once or twice in the grounds, or in the village, and I couldn't but think there was a change in him too; but I set it down to my disordered fancy.

The weeks passed, and Mr. Brympton had now been a month absent. We heard he was cruising with a friend in the West Indies, and Mr. Wace said that was a long way off, but though you had the wings of a dove and went to the uttermost parts of the earth, you couldn't get away from the Almighty. Agnes said that as long as he stayed away from Brympton the Almighty might have him and welcome; and this raised a laugh, though Mrs. Blinder tried to look shocked, and Mr. Wace said the bears would eat us.

We were all glad to hear that the West Indies were a long way off, and I remember that, in spite of Mr. Wace's solemn looks, we had a very merry dinner that day in the hall. I don't know if it was because of my being in better spirits, but I fancied Mrs. Brympton looked better too, and seemed more cheerful in her manner. She had been for a walk in the morning, and after luncheon she lay down in her room, and I read aloud to her. When she dismissed me I went to my own room feeling quite bright and happy, and for the first time in weeks walked past the locked door without thinking of it. As I sat down to my work I looked out and saw a few snow-flakes falling. The sight was pleasanter than the eternal rain, and I pictured to myself how pretty the bare gardens would look in their white mantle. It seemed to me as if the snow would cover up all the dreariness, indoors as well as out.

The fancy had hardly crossed my mind when I heard a step at my side. I looked up, thinking it was Agnes.

"Well, Agnes—" said I, and the words froze on my tongue; for there, in the door, stood Emma Saxon,

I don't know how long she stood there. I only know I couldn't stir or take my eyes from her. Afterward I was terribly frightened, but at the time it wasn't fear I felt, but something deeper and quieter. She looked at me long and long, and her face was just one dumb prayer to me—but how in the world was I to help her? Suddenly she turned, and I heard her walk down the passage. This time I wasn't afraid to follow—I felt that I must know what she wanted. I sprang up and ran

out. She was at the other end of the passage, and I expected her to take the turn toward my mistress's room; but instead of that she pushed open the door that led to the backstairs. I followed her down the stairs, and across the passageway to the back door. The kitchen and hall were empty at that hour, the servants being off duty, except for the footman, who was in the pantry. At the door she stood still a moment, with another look at me; then she turned the handle, and stepped out. For a minute I hesitated. Where was she leading me to? The door had closed softly after her, and I opened it and looked out, half-expecting to find that she had disappeared. But I saw her a few yards off hurrying across the court-yard to the path through the woods. Her figure looked black and lonely in the snow, and for a second my heart failed me and I thought of turning back. But all the while she was drawing me after her; and catching up an old shawl of Mrs. Blinder's I ran out into the open.

Emma Saxon was in the wood-path now. She walked on steadily, and I followed at the same pace, till we passed out of the gates and reached the high-road. Then she struck across the open fields to the village. By this time the ground was white, and as she climbed the slope of a bare hill ahead of me I noticed that she left no foot-prints behind her. At sight of that my heart shrivelled up within me, and my knees were water. Somehow, it was worse here than indoors. She made the whole countryside seem lonely as the grave, with none but us two in it, and no help in the wide world.

Once I tried to go back; but she turned and looked at me, and it was as if she had dragged me with ropes. After that I followed her like a dog. We came to the village and she led me through it, past the church and the blacksmith's shop, and down the lane to Mr. Ranford's. Mr. Ranford's house stands close to the road: a plain old-fashioned building, with a flagged path leading to the door between box-borders. The lane was deserted, and as I turned into it I saw Emma Saxon pause under the old elm by the gate. And now another fear came over me. I saw that we had reached the end of our

journey, and that it was my turn to act. All the way from Brympton I had been asking myself what she wanted of me, but I had followed in a trance, as it were, and not till I saw her stop at Mr. Ranford's gate did my brain begin to clear itself. I stood a little way off in the snow, my heart beating fit to strangle me, and my feet frozen to the ground; and she stood under the elm and watched me.

I knew well enough that she hadn't led me there for nothing. I felt there was something I ought to say or do—but how was I to guess what it was? I had never thought harm of my mistress and Mr. Ranford, but I was sure now that, from one cause or another, some dreadful thing hung over them. *She* knew what it was; she would tell me if she could; perhaps she would answer if I questioned her.

It turned me faint to think of speaking to her; but I plucked up heart and dragged myself across the few yards between us. As I did so, I heard the house-door open and saw Mr. Ranford approaching. He looked handsome and cheerful, as my mistress had looked that morning, and at sight of him the blood began to flow again in my veins.

"Why, Hartley," said he, "what's the matter? I saw you coming down the lane just now, and came out to see if you had taken root in the snow." He stopped and stared at me. "What are you looking at?" he says.

I turned toward the elm as he spoke, and his eyes followed me; but there was no one there. The lane was empty as far as the eye could reach.

A sense of helplessness came over me. She was gone, and I had not been able to guess what she wanted. Her last look had pierced me to the marrow; and yet it had not told me! All at once, I felt more desolate than when she had stood there watching me. It seemed as if she had left me all alone to carry the weight of the secret I couldn't guess. The snow went round me in great circles, and the ground fell away from me . . .

A drop of brandy and the warmth of Mr. Ranford's fire soon

brought me to, and I insisted on being driven back at once to Brympton. It was nearly dark, and I was afraid my mistress might be wanting me. I explained to Mr. Ranford that I had been out for a walk and had been taken with a fit of giddiness as I passed his gate. This was true enough; yet I never felt more like a liar than when I said it.

When I dressed Mrs. Brympton for dinner she remarked on my pale looks and asked what ailed me. I told her I had a headache, and she said she would not require me again that evening, and advised me to go to bed.

It was a fact that I could scarcely keep on my feet; yet I had no fancy to spend a solitary evening in my room. I sat downstairs in the hall as long as I could hold my head up; but by nine I crept upstairs, too weary to care what happened if I could but get my head on a pillow. The rest of the household went to bed soon afterward; they kept early hours when the master was away, and before ten I heard Mrs. Blinder's door close, and Mr. Wace's soon after.

It was a very still night, earth and air all muffled in snow. Once in bed I felt easier, and lay quiet, listening to the strange noises that come out in a house after dark. Once I thought I heard a door open and close again below: it might have been the glass door that led to the gardens. I got up and peered out of the window; but it was in the dark of the moon, and nothing visible outside but the streaking of snow against the panes.

I went back to bed and must have dozed, for I jumped awake to the furious ringing of my bell. Before my head was clear I had sprung out of bed, and was dragging on my clothes. *It is going to happen now*, I heard myself saying; but what I meant I had no notion. My hands seemed to be covered with glue—I thought I should never get into my clothes. At last I opened my door and peered down the passage. As far as my candle-flame carried, I could see nothing unusual ahead of me. I hurried on, breathless; but as I pushed open the baize door leading to the main hall my heart stood still, for there at the head of

the stairs was Emma Saxon, peering dreadfully down into the darkness.

For a second I couldn't stir; but my hand slipped from the door, and as it swung shut the figure vanished. At the same instant there came another sound from below stairs—a stealthy mysterious sound, as of a latch-key turning in the house-door. I ran to Mrs. Brympton's room and knocked.

There was no answer, and I knocked again. This time I heard someone moving in the room; the bolt slipped back and my mistress stood before me. To my surprise I saw that she had not undressed for the night. She gave me a startled look.

"What is this, Hartley?" she says in a whisper. "Are you ill? What are you doing here at this hour?"

"I am not ill, madam; but my bell rang."

At that she turned pale, and seemed about to fall.

"You are mistaken," she said harshly; "I didn't ring. You must have been dreaming." I had never heard her speak in such a tone. "Go back to bed," she said, closing the door on me.

But as she spoke I heard sounds again in the hall below: a man's step this time; and the truth leaped out on me.

"Madam," I said, pushing past her, "there is someone in the house —"

"Someone—?"

"Mr. Brympton, I think—I hear his step below—"

A dreadful look came over her, and without a word, she dropped flat at my feet. I fell on my knees and tried to lift her: by the way she breathed I saw it was no common faint. But as I raised her head there came quick steps on the stairs and across the hall: the door was flung open, and there stood Mr. Brympton, in his travelling-clothes, the snow dripping from him. He drew back with a start as he saw me kneeling by my mistress.

"What the devil is this?" he shouted. He was less high-coloured than usual, and the red spot came out on his forehead.

"Mrs. Brympton has fainted, sir," said I.

He laughed unsteadily and pushed by me. "It's a pity she didn't choose a more convenient moment. I'm sorry to disturb her, but—"

I raised myself up aghast at the man's action.

"Sir," said I, "are you mad? What are you doing?"

"Going to meet a friend," said he, and seemed to make for the dressing-room.

At that my heart turned over. I don't know what I thought or feared; but I sprang up and caught him by the sleeve. "Sir, sir," said I, "for pity's sake look at your wife!" He shook me off furiously.

"It seems that's done for me," says he, and caught hold of the dressing-room door.

At that moment I heard a slight noise inside. Slight as it was, he heard it too, and tore the door open; but as he did so he dropped back. On the threshold stood Emma Saxon. All was dark behind her, but I saw her plainly, and so did he. He threw up his hands as if to hide his face from her; and when I looked again she was gone.

He stood motionless, as if the strength had run out of him; and in the stillness my mistress suddenly raised herself, and opening her eyes fixed a look on him. Then she fell back, and I saw the death-flutter pass over her . . .

We buried her on the third day, in a driving snow-storm. There were few people in the church, for it was bad weather to come from town, and I've a notion my mistress was one that hadn't many near friends. Mr. Ranford was among the last to come, just before they carried her up the aisle. He was in black, of course, being such a friend of the family, and I never saw a gentleman so pale. As he passed me, I noticed that he leaned a trifle on a stick he carried; and I fancy Mr. Brympton noticed it too, for the red spot came out sharp on his forehead, and all through the service he kept staring across the church at Mr. Ranford, instead of following the prayers as a mourner should.

When it was over and we went out to the graveyard, Mr. Ranford

had disappeared, and as soon as my poor mistress's body was underground, Mr. Brympton jumped into the carriage nearest the gate and drove off without a word to any of us. I heard him call out, "To the station," and we servants went back alone to the house.

The House of the Dead Hand

ABOVE ALL," the letter ended, "don't leave Siena without seeing Doctor Lombard's Leonardo. Lombard is a queer old Englishman, a mystic or a madman (if the two are not synonymous), and a devout student of the Italian Renaissance. He has lived for years in Italy, exploring its remotest corners, and has lately picked up an undoubted Leonardo, which came to light in a farmhouse near Bergamo. It is believed to be one of the missing pictures mentioned by Vasari, and is at any rate, according to the most competent authorities, a genuine and almost untouched example of the best period.

"Lombard is a queer stick, and jealous of showing his treasures; but we struck up a friendship when I was working on the Sodomas in Siena three years ago, and if you will give him the enclosed line you may get a peep at the Leonardo. Probably not more than a peep, though, for I hear he refuses to have it reproduced. I want badly to use it in my monograph on the Windsor drawings, so please see what you can do for me, and if you can't persuade him to let you take a photograph or make a sketch, at least jot down a detailed description of the picture and get from him all the facts you can. I hear that the French and Italian governments have offered him a large advance on his purchase, but that he refuses to sell at any price, though he certainly can't afford such luxuries; in fact, I don't see where he got enough money to buy the picture. He lives in the Via Papa Giulio."

Wyant sat at the table d'hôte of his hotel, re-reading his friend's letter over a late luncheon. He had been five days in Siena without

having found time to call on Doctor Lombard; not from any indifference to the opportunity presented, but because it was his first visit to the strange red city and he was still under the spell of its more conspicuous wonders—the brick palaces flinging out their wrought-iron torch-holders with a gesture of arrogant suzerainty; the great council-chamber emblazoned with civic allegories; the pageant of Pope Julius on the Library walls; the Sodomas smiling balefully through the dusk of mouldering chapels—and it was only when his first hunger was appeased that he remembered that one course in the banquet was still untasted.

He put the letter in his pocket and turned to leave the room, with a nod to its only other occupant, an olive-skinned young man with lustrous eyes and a low collar, who sat on the other side of the table, perusing the *Fan fulla di Domenica*. This gentleman, his daily vis-à-vis, returned the nod with a Latin eloquence of gesture, and Wyant passed on to the antechamber, where he paused to light a cigarette. He was just restoring the case to his pocket when he heard a hurried step behind him, and the lustrous-eyed young man advanced through the glass doors of the dining-room.

“Pardon me, sir,” he said in measured English, and with an intonation of exquisite politeness; “you have let this letter fall.”

Wyant, recognizing his friend’s note of introduction to Doctor Lombard, took it with a word of thanks, and was about to turn away when he perceived that the eyes of his fellow diner remained fixed on him with a gaze of melancholy interrogation.

“Again pardon me,” the young man at length ventured, “but are you by chance the friend of the illustrious Doctor Lombard?”

“No,” returned Wyant, with the instinctive Anglo-Saxon distrust of foreign advances. Then, fearing to appear rude, he said with a guarded politeness: “Perhaps, by the way, you can tell me the number of his house. I see it is not given here.”

The young man brightened perceptibly. “The number of the house is thirteen; but any one can indicate it to you—it is well known in

Siena. It is called," he continued after a moment, "the House of the Dead Hand."

Wyant stared. "What a queer name!" he said.

"The name comes from an antique hand of marble which for many hundred years has been above the door."

Wyant was turning away with a gesture of thanks, when the other added: "If you would have the kindness to ring twice."

"To ring twice?"

"At the doctor's." The young man smiled. "It is the custom."

It was a dazzling March afternoon, with a shower of sun from the mid-blue, and a marshalling of slaty clouds behind the umber-colored hills. For nearly an hour Wyant loitered on the Lizza, watching the shadows race across the naked landscape and the thunder blacken in the west; then he decided to set out for the House of the Dead Hand. The map in his guidebook showed him that the Via Papa Giulio was one of the streets which radiate from the Piazza, and thither he bent his course, pausing at every other step to fill his eye with some fresh image of weather-beaten beauty. The clouds had rolled upward, obscuring the sunshine and hanging like a funereal baldachin above the projecting cornices of Doctor Lombard's street, and Wyant walked for some distance in the shade of the beetling palace fronts before his eye fell on a doorway surmounted by a sallow marble hand. He stood for a moment staring up at the strange emblem. The hand was a woman's—a dead drooping hand, which hung there convulsed and helpless, as though it had been thrust forth in denunciation of some evil mystery within the house, and had sunk struggling into death.

A girl who was drawing water from the well in the court said that the English doctor lived on the first floor, and Wyant, passing through a glazed door, mounted the damp degrees of a vaulted stairway with a plaster Æsculapius mouldering in a niche on the landing. Facing the Æsculapius was another door, and as Wyant put his hand on the bell-rope he remembered his unknown friend's

injunction, and rang twice.

His ring was answered by a peasant woman with a low forehead and small close-set eyes, who, after a prolonged scrutiny of himself, his card, and his letter of introduction, left him standing in a high, cold ante-chamber floored with brick. He heard her wooden pattens click down an interminable corridor, and after some delay she returned and told him to follow her.

They passed through a long saloon, bare as the ante-chamber, but loftily vaulted, and frescoed with a seventeenth-century Triumph of Scipio or Alexander—martial figures following Wyant with the filmed melancholy gaze of shades in limbo. At the end of this apartment he was admitted to a smaller room, with the same atmosphere of mortal cold, but showing more obvious signs of occupancy. The walls were covered with tapestry which had faded to the gray-brown tints of decaying vegetation, so that the young man felt as though he were entering a sunless autumn wood. Against these hangings stood a few tall cabinets on heavy gilt feet, and at a table in the window three persons were seated: an elderly lady who was warming her hands over a brazier, a girl bent above a strip of needle-work, and an old man.

As the latter advanced toward Wyant, the young man was conscious of staring with unseemly intentness at his small round-backed figure, dressed with shabby disorder and surmounted by a wonderful head, lean, vulpine, eagle-beaked as that of some art-loving despot of the Renaissance: a head combining the venerable hair and large prominent eyes of the humanist with the greedy profile of the adventurer. Wyant, in musing on the Italian portrait-medals of the fifteenth century, had often fancied that only in that period of fierce individualism could types so paradoxical have been produced; yet the subtle craftsmen who committed them to the bronze had never drawn a face more strangely stamped with contradictory passions than that of Doctor Lombard.

"I am glad to see you," he said to Wyant, extending a hand which

seemed a mere framework held together by knotted veins. "We lead a quiet life here and receive few visitors, but any friend of Professor Clyde's is welcome." Then, with a gesture which included the two women, he added dryly: "My wife and daughter often talk of Professor Clyde."

"Oh yes—he used to make me such nice toast; they don't understand toast in Italy," said Mrs. Lombard in a high plaintive voice.

It would have been difficult, from Doctor Lombard's manner and appearance, to guess his nationality; but his wife was so inconsciently and ineradicably English that even the silhouette of her cap seemed a protest against Continental laxities. She was a stout fair woman, with pale cheeks netted with red lines. A brooch with a miniature portrait sustained a bog-wood watch-chain upon her bosom, and at her elbow lay a heap of knitting and an old copy of *The Queen*.

The young girl, who had remained standing, was a slim replica of her mother, with an apple-cheeked face and opaque blue eyes. Her small head was prodigally laden with braids of dull fair hair, and she might have had a kind of transient prettiness but for the sullen droop of her round mouth. It was hard to say whether her expression implied ill-temper or apathy; but Wyant was struck by the contrast between the fierce vitality of the doctor's age and the inanimateness of his daughter's youth.

Seating himself in the chair which his host advanced, the young man tried to open the conversation by addressing to Mrs. Lombard some random remark on the beauties of Siena. The lady murmured a resigned assent, and Doctor Lombard interposed with a smile: "My dear sir, my wife considers Siena a most salubrious spot, and is favorably impressed by the cheapness of the marketing; but she deplores the total absence of muffins and cannel coal, and cannot resign herself to the Italian method of dusting furniture."

"But they don't, you know—they don't dust it!" Mrs. Lombard

protested, without showing any resentment of her husband's manner.

"Precisely—they don't dust it. Since we have lived in Siena we have not once seen the cobwebs removed from the battlements of the Mangia. Can you conceive of such housekeeping? My wife has never yet dared to write it home to her aunts at Bonchurch."

Mrs. Lombard accepted in silence this remarkable statement of her views, and her husband, with a malicious smile at Wyant's embarrassment, planted himself suddenly before the young man.

"And now," said he, "do you want to see my Leonardo?"

"Do I?" cried Wyant, on his feet in a flash.

The doctor chuckled. "Ah," he said, with a kind of crooning deliberation, "that's the way they all behave—that's what they all come for." He turned to his daughter with another variation of mockery in his smile. "Don't fancy it's for your *beaux yeux*, my dear; or for the mature charms of Mrs. Lombard," he added, glaring suddenly at his wife, who had taken up her knitting and was softly murmuring over the number of her stitches.

Neither lady appeared to notice his pleasantries, and he continued, addressing himself to Wyant: "They all come—they all come; but many are called and few are chosen." His voice sank to solemnity. "While I live," he said, "no unworthy eye shall desecrate that picture. But I will not do my friend Clyde the injustice to suppose that he would send an unworthy representative. He tells me he wishes a description of the picture for his book; and you shall describe it to him—if you can."

Wyant hesitated, not knowing whether it was a propitious moment to put in his appeal for a photograph.

"Well, sir," he said, "you know Clyde wants me to take away all I can of it."

Doctor Lombard eyed him sardonically. "You're welcome to take away all you can carry," he replied; adding, as he turned to his daughter: "That is, if he has your permission, Sybilla."

The girl rose without a word, and laying aside her work, took a

key from a secret drawer in one of the cabinets, while the doctor continued in the same note of grim jocularity: "For you must know that the picture is not mine—it is my daughter's."

He followed with evident amusement the surprised glance which Wyant turned on the young girl's impassive figure.

"Sybilla," he pursued, "is a votary of the arts; she has inherited her fond father's passion for the unattainable. Luckily, however, she also recently inherited a tidy legacy from her grandmother; and having seen the Leonardo, on which its discoverer had placed a price far beyond my reach, she took a step which deserves to go down to history: she invested her whole inheritance in the purchase of the picture, thus enabling me to spend my closing years in communion with one of the world's masterpieces. My dear sir, could Antigone do more?"

The object of this strange eulogy had meanwhile drawn aside one of the tapestry hangings, and fitted her key into a concealed door.

"Come," said Doctor Lombard, "let us go before the light fails us."

Wyant glanced at Mrs. Lombard, who continued to knit impassively.

"No, no," said his host, "my wife will not come with us. You might not suspect it from her conversation, but my wife has no feeling for art—Italian art, that is; for no one is fonder of our early Victorian school."

"Frith's *Railway Station*, you know," said Mrs. Lombard, smiling. "I like an animated picture."

Miss Lombard, who had unlocked the door, held back the tapestry to let her father and Wyant pass out; then she followed them down a narrow stone passage with another door at its end. This door was iron-barred, and Wyant noticed that it had a complicated patent lock. The girl fitted another key into the lock, and Doctor Lombard led the way into a small room. The dark panelling of this apartment was irradiated by streams of yellow light slanting through the disbanded thunder clouds, and in the central brightness hung a picture

concealed by a curtain of faded velvet.

“A little too bright, Sybilla,” said Doctor Lombard. His face had grown solemn and his mouth twitched nervously as his daughter drew a linen drape across the upper part of the window.

“That will do—that will do.” He turned impressively to Wyant. “Do you see the pomegranate bud in this rug? Place yourself there—keep your left foot on it, please. And now, Sybilla, draw the cord.”

Miss Lombard advanced and placed her hand on a cord hidden behind the velvet curtain.

“Ah,” said the doctor, “one moment. I should like you, while looking at the picture, to have in mind a few lines of verse. Sybilla —”

Without the slightest change of countenance, and with a promptness which proved her to be prepared for the request, Miss Lombard began to recite, in a full round voice like her mother’s, St. Bernard’s invocation to the Virgin, in the thirty-third canto of the *Paradise*.

“Thank you, my dear,” said her father, drawing a deep breath as she ended. “That unapproachable combination of vowel sounds prepares one better than anything I know for the contemplation of the picture.”

As he spoke the folds of velvet slowly parted, and the Leonardo appeared in its frame of tarnished gold.

From the nature of Miss Lombard’s recitation Wyant had expected a sacred subject, and his surprise was therefore great as the composition was gradually revealed by the widening division of the curtain.

In the background a steel-colored river wound through a pale calcareous landscape; while to the left, on a lonely peak, a crucified Christ hung livid against indigo clouds. The central figure of the foreground, however, was that of a woman seated in an antique chair of marble with bas-reliefs of dancing mænads. Her feet rested on a meadow sprinkled with minute wild-flowers, and her attitude of

smiling majesty recalled that of Dosso Dossi's Circe. She wore a red robe, flowing in closely fluted lines from under a fancifully embroidered cloak. Above her high forehead the crinkled golden hair flowed sideways beneath a veil; one hand drooped on the arm of her chair; the other held up an inverted human skull, into which a young Dionysus, smooth, brown and sidelong as the St. John of the Louvre, poured a stream of wine from a high-poised flagon. At the lady's feet lay the symbols of art and luxury: a flute and a roll of music, a platter heaped with grapes and roses, the torso of a Greek statuette, and a bowl overflowing with coins and jewels; behind her, on the chalky hilltop, hung the crucified Christ. A scroll in a corner of the foreground bore the legend: *Lux Mundi*.

Wyant, emerging from the first plunge of wonder, turned inquiringly toward his companions. Neither had moved. Miss Lombard stood with her hand on the cord, her lids lowered, her mouth drooping; the doctor, his strange Thoth-like profile turned toward his guest, was still lost in rapt contemplation of his treasure.

Wyant addressed the young girl.

"You are fortunate," he said, "to be the possessor of anything so perfect."

"It is considered very beautiful," she said coldly.

"Beautiful—*beautiful!*" the doctor burst out. "Ah, the poor, worn out, overworked word! There are no adjectives in the language fresh enough to describe such pristine brilliancy: all their brightness has been worn off by misuse. Think of the things that have been called beautiful, and then look at *that!*"

"It is worthy of a new vocabulary," Wyant agreed.

"Yes," Doctor Lombard continued, "my daughter is indeed fortunate. She has chosen what Catholics call the higher life—the counsel of perfection. What other private person enjoys the same opportunity of understanding the master? Who else lives under the same roof with an untouched masterpiece of Leonardo's? Think of the happiness of being always under the influence of such a creation;

of living *into* it; of partaking of it in daily and hourly communion! This room is a chapel; the sight of that picture is a sacrament. What an atmosphere for a young life to unfold itself in! My daughter is singularly blessed. Sybilla, point out some of the details to Mr. Wyant: I see that he will appreciate them.”

The girl turned her dense blue eyes toward Wyant; then, glancing away from him, she pointed to the canvas.

“Notice the modelling of the left hand,” she began in a monotonous voice: “it recalls the hand of the Mona Lisa. The head of the naked genius will remind you of that of the St. John of the Louvre, but it is more purely pagan and is turned a little less to the right. The embroidery on the cloak is symbolic: you will see that the roots of this plant have burst through the vase. This recalls the famous definition of Hamlet’s character in *Wilhelm Meister*. Here are the mystic rose, the flame, and the serpent, emblem of eternity. Some of the other symbols we have not yet been able to decipher.”

Wyant watched her curiously: she seemed to be reciting a lesson.

“And the picture itself?” he said. “How do you explain that? *Lux Mundi*—what a curious device to connect with such a subject! What can it mean?”

Miss Lombard dropped her eyes: the answer was evidently not included in her lesson.

“What, indeed?” the doctor interposed. “What does life mean? As one may define it in a hundred different ways, so one may find a hundred different meanings in this picture. Its symbolism is as many-faceted as a well-cut diamond. Who, for instance, is that divine lady? Is it she who is the true *Lux Mundi*—the light reflected from jewels and young eyes, from polished marble and clear waters and statues of bronze? Or is that the Light of the World, extinguished on yonder stormy hill, and is this lady the Pride of Life, feasting blindly on the wine of iniquity, with her back turned to the light which has shone for her in vain? Something of both these meanings may be traced in the picture; but to me it symbolizes rather the central truth of

existence: that all that is raised in incorruption is sown in corruption; art, beauty, love, religion; that all our wine is drunk out of skulls, and poured for us by the mysterious genius of a remote and cruel past.”

The doctor’s face blazed: his bent figure seemed to straighten itself and become taller.

“Ah,” he cried, growing more dithyrambic, “how lightly you ask what it means! How confidently you expect an answer! Yet here am I who have given my life to the study of the Renaissance; who have violated its tomb, laid open its dead body, and traced the course of every muscle, bone and artery; who have sucked its very soul from the pages of poets and humanists; who have wept and believed with Joachim of Flora, smiled and doubted with Æneas Sylvius Piccolomini; who have patiently followed to its source the least inspiration of the masters, and groped in neolithic caverns and Babylonian ruins for the first unfolding tendrils of the arabesques of Mantegna and Crivelli; and I tell you that I stand abashed and ignorant before the mystery of this picture. It means nothing—it means all things. It may represent the period which saw its creation; it may represent all ages past and to come. There are volumes of meaning in the tiniest emblem on the lady’s cloak; the blossoms of its border are rooted in the deepest soil of myth and tradition. Don’t ask what it means, young man, but bow your head in thankfulness for having seen it!”

Miss Lombard laid her hand on his arm.

“Don’t excite yourself, father,” she said in the detached tone of a professional nurse.

He answered with a despairing gesture. “Ah, it’s easy for you to talk. You have years and years to spend with it; I am an old man, and every moment counts!”

“It’s bad for you,” she repeated with gentle obstinacy.

The doctor’s sacred fury had in fact burnt itself out. He dropped into a seat with dull eyes and slackening lips, and his daughter drew

the curtain across the picture.

Wyant turned away reluctantly. He felt that his opportunity was slipping from him, yet he dared not refer to Clyde's wish for a photograph. He now understood the meaning of the laugh with which Doctor Lombard had given him leave to carry away all the details he could remember. The picture was so dazzling, so unexpected, so crossed with elusive and contradictory suggestions, that the most alert observer, when placed suddenly before it, must lose his coördinating faculty in a sense of confused wonder. Yet how valuable to Clyde the record of such a work would be! In some ways it seemed to be the summing up of the master's thought, the key to his enigmatic philosophy.

The doctor had risen and was walking slowly toward the door. His daughter unlocked it, and Wyant followed them back in silence to the room in which they had left Mrs. Lombard. That lady was no longer there, and he could think of no excuse for lingering.

He thanked the doctor, and turned to Miss Lombard, who stood in the middle of the room as though awaiting farther orders.

"It is very good of you," he said, "to allow one even a glimpse of such a treasure."

She looked at him with her odd directness. "You will come again?" she said quickly; and turning to her father she added: "You know what Professor Clyde asked. This gentleman cannot give him any account of the picture without seeing it again."

Doctor Lombard glanced at her vaguely; he was still like a person in a trance.

"Eh?" he said, rousing himself with an effort.

"I said, father, that Mr. Wyant must see the picture again if he is to tell Professor Clyde about it," Miss Lombard repeated with extraordinary precision of tone.

Wyant was silent. He had the puzzled sense that his wishes were being divined and gratified for reasons with which he was in no way connected.

“Well, well,” the doctor muttered, “I don’t say no—I don’t say no. I know what Clyde wants—I don’t refuse to help him.” He turned to Wyant. “You may come again—you may make notes,” he added with a sudden effort. “Jot down what occurs to you. I’m willing to concede that.”

Wyant again caught the girl’s eye, but its emphatic message perplexed him.

“You’re very good,” he said tentatively, “but the fact is the picture is so mysterious—so full of complicated detail—that I’m afraid no notes I could make would serve Clyde’s purpose as well as—as a photograph, say. If you would allow me—”

Miss Lombard’s brow darkened, and her father raised his head furiously.

“A photograph? A photograph, did you say? Good God, man, not ten people have been allowed to set foot in that room! A *photograph?*”

Wyant saw his mistake, but saw also that he had gone too far to retreat.

“I know, sir, from what Clyde has told me, that you object to having any reproduction of the picture published; but he hoped you might let me take a photograph for his personal use—not to be reproduced in his book, but simply to give him something to work by. I should take the photograph myself, and the negative would of course be yours. If you wished it, only one impression would be struck off, and that one Clyde could return to you when he had done with it.”

Doctor Lombard interrupted him with a snarl. “When he had done with it? Just so: I thank thee for that word! When it had been re-photographed, drawn, traced, autotyped, passed about from hand to hand, defiled by every ignorant eye in England, vulgarized by the blundering praise of every art-scribbler in Europe! Pah! I’d as soon give you the picture itself: why don’t you ask for that?”

“Well, sir,” said Wyant calmly, “if you will trust me with it, I’ll

engage to take it safely to England and back, and to let no eye but Clyde's see it while it is out of your keeping."

The doctor received this remarkable proposal in silence; then he burst into a laugh.

"Upon my soul!" he said with sardonic good humor.

It was Miss Lombard's turn to look perplexedly at Wyant. His last words and her father's unexpected reply had evidently carried her beyond her depth.

"Well, sir, am I to take the picture?" Wyant smilingly pursued.

"No, young man; nor a photograph of it. Nor a sketch, either; mind that,—nothing that can be reproduced. Sybilla," he cried with sudden passion, "swear to me that the picture shall never be reproduced! No photograph, no sketch—now or afterward. Do you hear me?"

"Yes, father," said the girl quietly.

"The vandals," he muttered, "the desecrators of beauty; if I thought it would ever get into their hands I'd burn it first, by God!" He turned to Wyant, speaking more quietly. "I said you might come back—I never retract what I say. But you must give me your word that no one but Clyde shall see the notes you make."

Wyant was growing warm.

"If you won't trust me with a photograph I wonder you trust me not to show my notes!" he exclaimed.

The doctor looked at him with a malicious smile. "Humph!" he said; "would they be of much use to anybody?"

Wyant saw that he was losing ground and controlled his impatience.

"To Clyde, I hope, at any rate," he answered, holding out his hand. The doctor shook it without a trace of resentment, and Wyant added: "When shall I come, sir?"

"To-morrow—to-morrow morning," cried Miss Lombard, speaking suddenly.

She looked fixedly at her father, and he shrugged his shoulders.

"The picture is hers," he said to Wyant.

In the ante-chamber the young man was met by the woman who had admitted him. She handed him his hat and stick, and turned to unbar the door. As the bolt slipped back he felt a touch on his arm.

"You have a letter?" she said in a low tone.

"A letter?" He stared. "What letter?"

She shrugged her shoulders, and drew back to let him pass.

II

As Wyant emerged from the house he paused once more to glance up at its scarred brick façade. The marble hand drooped tragically above the entrance: in the waning light it seemed to have relaxed into the passiveness of despair, and Wyant stood musing on its hidden meaning. But the Dead Hand was not the only mysterious thing about Doctor Lombard's house. What were the relations between Miss Lombard and her father? Above all, between Miss Lombard and her picture? She did not look like a person capable of a disinterested passion for the arts; and there had been moments when it struck Wyant that she hated the picture.

The sky at the end of the street was flooded with turbulent yellow light, and the young man turned his steps toward the church of San Domenico, in the hope of catching the lingering brightness on Sodoma's St. Catherine.

The great bare aisles were almost dark when he entered, and he had to grope his way to the chapel steps. Under the momentary evocation of the sunset, the saint's figure emerged pale and swooning from the dusk, and the warm light gave a sensual tinge to her ecstasy. The flesh seemed to glow and heave, the eyelids to tremble; Wyant stood fascinated by the accidental collaboration of light and color.

Suddenly he noticed that something white had fluttered to the ground at his feet. He stooped and picked up a small thin sheet of

note-paper, folded and sealed like an old-fashioned letter, and bearing the superscription:—

To the Count Ottaviano Celsi.

Wyant stared at this mysterious document. Where had it come from? He was distinctly conscious of having seen it fall through the air, close to his feet. He glanced up at the dark ceiling of the chapel; then he turned and looked about the church. There was only one figure in it, that of a man who knelt near the high altar.

Suddenly Wyant recalled the question of Doctor Lombard's maid-servant. Was this the letter she had asked for? Had he been unconsciously carrying it about with him all the afternoon? Who was Count Ottaviano Celsi, and how came Wyant to have been chosen to act as that nobleman's ambulant letter-box?

Wyant laid his hat and stick on the chapel steps and began to explore his pockets, in the irrational hope of finding there some clue to the mystery; but they held nothing which he had not himself put there, and he was reduced to wondering how the letter, supposing some unknown hand to have bestowed it on him, had happened to fall out while he stood motionless before the picture.

At this point he was disturbed by a step on the floor of the aisle, and turning, he saw his lustrous-eyed neighbor of the table d'hôte.

The young man bowed and waved an apologetic hand. "I do not intrude?" he inquired suavely.

Without waiting for a reply, he mounted the steps of the chapel, glancing about him with the affable air of an afternoon caller.

"I see," he remarked with a smile, "that you know the hour at which our saint should be visited."

Wyant agreed that the hour was indeed felicitous.

The stranger stood beamingly before the picture.

"What grace! What poetry!" he murmured, apostrophizing the St. Catherine, but letting his glance slip rapidly about the chapel as he spoke.

Wyant, detecting the manoeuvre, murmured a brief assent.

"But it is cold here—mortally cold; you do not find it so?" The intruder put on his hat. "It is permitted at this hour—when the church is empty. And you, my dear sir—do you not feel the dampness? You are an artist, are you not? And to artists it is permitted to cover the head when they are engaged in the study of the paintings."

He darted suddenly toward the steps and bent over Wyant's hat.

"Permit me—cover yourself!" he said a moment later, holding out the hat with an ingratiating gesture.

A light flashed on Wyant.

"Perhaps," he said, looking straight at the young man, "you will tell me your name. My own is Wyant."

The stranger, surprised, but not disconcerted, drew forth a coroneted card, which he offered with a low bow. On the card was engraved:—

Il Conte Ottaviano Celsi.

"I am much obliged to you," said Wyant; "and I may as well tell you that the letter which you apparently expected to find in the lining of my hat is not there, but in my pocket."

He drew it out and handed it to its owner, who had grown very pale.

"And now," Wyant continued, "you will perhaps be good enough to tell me what all this means."

There was no mistaking the effect produced on Count Ottaviano by this request. His lips moved, but he achieved only an ineffectual smile.

"I suppose you know," Wyant went on, his anger rising at the sight of the other's discomfiture, "that you have taken an unwarrantable liberty. I don't yet understand what part I have been made to play, but it's evident that you have made use of me to serve some purpose of your own, and I propose to know the reason why."

Count Ottaviano advanced with an imploring gesture. "Sir," he pleaded, "you permit me to speak?"

"I expect you to," cried Wyant. "But not here," he added, hearing the clank of the verger's keys. "It is growing dark, and we shall be turned out in a few minutes."

He walked across the church, and Count Ottaviano followed him out into the deserted square.

"Now," said Wyant, pausing on the steps.

The Count, who had regained some measure of self-possession, began to speak in a high key, with an accompaniment of conciliatory gesture.

"My dear sir—my dear Mr. Wyant—you find me in an abominable position—that, as a man of honor, I immediately confess. I have taken advantage of you—yes! I have counted on your amiability, your chivalry—too far, perhaps? I confess it! But what could I do? It was to oblige a lady"—he laid a hand on his heart—"a lady whom I would die to serve!" He went on with increasing volubility, his deliberate English swept away by a torrent of Italian, through which Wyant, with some difficulty, struggled to a comprehension of the case.

Count Ottaviano, according to his own statement, had come to Siena some months previously, on business connected with his mother's property; the paternal estate being near Orvieto, of which ancient city his father was syndic. Soon after his arrival in Siena the young Count had met the incomparable daughter of Doctor Lombard, and falling deeply in love with her, had prevailed on his parents to ask her hand in marriage. Doctor Lombard had not opposed his suit, but when the question of settlements arose it became known that Miss Lombard, who was possessed of a small property in her own right, had a short time before invested the whole amount in the purchase of the Bergamo Leonardo. Thereupon Count Ottaviano's parents had politely suggested that she should sell the picture and thus recover her independence; and this proposal being met by a curt refusal from Doctor Lombard, they had withdrawn their consent to their son's marriage. The young lady's attitude had hitherto been one

of passive submission; she was horribly afraid of her father, and would never venture openly to oppose him; but she had made known to Ottaviano her intention of not giving him up, of waiting patiently till events should take a more favorable turn. She seemed hardly aware, the Count said with a sigh, that the means of escape lay in her own hands; that she was of age, and had a right to sell the picture, and to marry without asking her father's consent. Meanwhile her suitor spared no pains to keep himself before her, to remind her that he, too, was waiting and would never give her up.

Doctor Lombard, who suspected the young man of trying to persuade Sybilla to sell the picture, had forbidden the lovers to meet or to correspond; they were thus driven to clandestine communication, and had several times, the Count ingenuously avowed, made use of the doctor's visitors as a means of exchanging letters.

"And you told the visitors to ring twice?" Wyant interposed.

The young man extended his hands in a deprecating gesture. Could Mr. Wyant blame him? He was young, he was ardent, he was enamored! The young lady had done him the supreme honor of avowing her attachment, of pledging her unalterable fidelity; should he suffer his devotion to be outdone? But his purpose in writing to her, he admitted, was not merely to reiterate his fidelity; he was trying by every means in his power to induce her to sell the picture. He had organized a plan of action; every detail was complete; if she would but have the courage to carry out his instructions he would answer for the result. His idea was that she should secretly retire to a convent of which his aunt was the Mother Superior, and from that stronghold should transact the sale of the Leonardo. He had a purchaser ready, who was willing to pay a large sum; a sum, Count Ottaviano whispered, considerably in excess of the young lady's original inheritance; once the picture sold, it could, if necessary, be removed by force from Doctor Lombard's house, and his daughter, being safely in the convent, would be spared the painful scenes

incidental to the removal. Finally, if Doctor Lombard were vindictive enough to refuse his consent to her marriage, she had only to make a *sommation respectueuse*, and at the end of the prescribed delay no power on earth could prevent her becoming the wife of Count Ottaviano.

Wyant's anger had fallen at the recital of this simple romance. It was absurd to be angry with a young man who confided his secrets to the first stranger he met in the streets, and placed his hand on his heart whenever he mentioned the name of his betrothed. The easiest way out of the business was to take it as a joke. Wyant had played the wall to this new Pyramus and Thisbe, and was philosophic enough to laugh at the part he had unwittingly performed.

He held out his hand with a smile to Count Ottaviano.

"I won't deprive you any longer," he said, "of the pleasure of reading your letter."

"Oh, sir, a thousand thanks! And when you return to the casa Lombard, you will take a message from me—the letter she expected this afternoon?"

"The letter she expected?" Wyant paused. "No, thank you. I thought you understood that where I come from we don't do that kind of thing—knowingly."

"But, sir, to serve a young lady!"

"I'm sorry for the young lady, if what you tell me is true"—the Count's expressive hands resented the doubt—"but remember that if I am under obligations to any one in this matter, it is to her father, who has admitted me to his house and has allowed me to see his picture."

"His picture? Hers!"

"Well, the house is his, at all events."

"Unhappily—since to her it is a dungeon!"

"Why doesn't she leave it, then?" exclaimed Wyant impatiently.

The Count clasped his hands. "Ah, how you say that—with what force, with what virility! If you would but say it to *her* in that tone—

you, her countryman! She has no one to advise her; the mother is an idiot; the father is terrible; she is in his power; it is my belief that he would kill her if she resisted him. Mr. Wyant, I tremble for her life while she remains in that house!"

"Oh, come," said Wyant lightly, "they seem to understand each other well enough. But in any case, you must see that I can't interfere—at least you would if you were an Englishman," he added with an escape of contempt.

III

Wyant's affiliations in Siena being restricted to an acquaintance with his landlady, he was forced to apply to her for the verification of Count Ottaviano's story.

The young nobleman had, it appeared, given a perfectly correct account of his situation. His father, Count Celsi-Mongirone, was a man of distinguished family and some wealth. He was syndic of Orvieto, and lived either in that town or on his neighboring estate of Mongirone. His wife owned a large property near Siena, and Count Ottaviano, who was the second son, came there from time to time to look into its management. The eldest son was in the army, the youngest in the Church; and an aunt of Count Ottaviano's was Mother Superior of the Visitandine convent in Siena. At one time it had been said that Count Ottaviano, who was a most amiable and accomplished young man, was to marry the daughter of the strange Englishman, Doctor Lombard, but difficulties having arisen as to the adjustment of the young lady's dower, Count Celsi-Mongirone had very properly broken off the match. It was sad for the young man, however, who was said to be deeply in love, and to find frequent excuses for coming to Siena to inspect his mother's estate.

Viewed in the light of Count Ottaviano's personality the story had a tinge of opera bouffe; but the next morning, as Wyant mounted the stairs of the House of the Dead Hand, the situation insensibly assumed another aspect. It was impossible to take Doctor Lombard

lightly; and there was a suggestion of fatality in the appearance of his gaunt dwelling. Who could tell amid what tragic records of domestic tyranny and fluttering broken purposes the little drama of Miss Lombard's fate was being played out? Might not the accumulated influences of such a house modify the lives within it in a manner unguessed by the inmates of a suburban villa with sanitary plumbing and a telephone?

One person, at least, remained unperturbed by such fanciful problems; and that was Mrs. Lombard, who, at Wyant's entrance, raised a placidly wrinkled brow from her knitting. The morning was mild, and her chair had been wheeled into a bar of sunshine near the window, so that she made a cheerful spot of prose in the poetic gloom of her surroundings.

"What a nice morning!" she said; "it must be delightful weather at Bonchurch."

Her dull blue glance wandered across the narrow street with its threatening house fronts, and fluttered back baffled, like a bird with clipped wings. It was evident, poor lady, that she had never seen beyond the opposite houses.

Wyant was not sorry to find her alone. Seeing that she was surprised at his reappearance he said at once: "I have come back to study Miss Lombard's picture."

"Oh, the picture—" Mrs. Lombard's face expressed a gentle disappointment, which might have been boredom in a person of acuter sensibilities. "It's an original Leonardo, you know," she said mechanically.

"And Miss Lombard is very proud of it, I suppose? She seems to have inherited her father's love for art."

Mrs. Lombard counted her stitches, and he went on: "It's unusual in so young a girl. Such tastes generally develop later."

Mrs. Lombard looked up eagerly. "That's what I say! I was quite different at her age, you know. I liked dancing, and doing a pretty bit of fancy-work. Not that I couldn't sketch, too; I had a master down

from London. My aunts have some of my crayons hung up in their drawing-room now—I did a view of Kenilworth which was thought pleasing. But I liked a picnic, too, or a pretty walk through the woods with young people of my own age. I say it's more natural, Mr. Wyant; one may have a feeling for art, and do crayons that are worth framing, and yet not give up everything else. I was taught that there were other things."

Wyant, half-ashamed of provoking these innocent confidences, could not resist another question. "And Miss Lombard cares for nothing else?"

Her mother looked troubled.

"Sybilla is so clever—she says I don't understand. You know how self-confident young people are! My husband never said that of me, now—he knows I had an excellent education. My aunts were very particular; I was brought up to have opinions, and my husband has always respected them. He says himself that he wouldn't for the world miss hearing my opinion on any subject; you may have noticed that he often refers to my tastes. He has always respected my preference for living in England; he likes to hear me give my reasons for it. He is so much interested in my ideas that he often says he knows just what I am going to say before I speak. But Sybilla does not care for what I think—"

At this point Doctor Lombard entered. He glanced sharply at Wyant. "The servant is a fool; she didn't tell me you were here." His eye turned to his wife. "Well, my dear, what have you been telling Mr. Wyant? About the aunts at Bonchurch, I'll be bound!"

Mrs. Lombard looked triumphantly at Wyant, and her husband rubbed his hooked fingers, with a smile.

"Mrs. Lombard's aunts are very superior women. They subscribe to the circulating library, and borrow *Good Words* and the *Monthly Packet* from the curate's wife across the way. They have the rector to tea twice a year, and keep a page-boy, and are visited by two baronets' wives. They devoted themselves to the education of their

orphan niece, and I think I may say without boasting that Mrs. Lombard's conversation shows marked traces of the advantages she enjoyed."

Mrs. Lombard colored with pleasure.

"I was telling Mr. Wyant that my aunts were very particular."

"Quite so, my dear; and did you mention that they never sleep in anything but linen, and that Miss Sophia puts away the furs and blankets every spring with her own hands? Both those facts are interesting to the student of human nature." Doctor Lombard glanced at his watch. "But we are missing an incomparable moment; the light is perfect at this hour."

Wyant rose, and the doctor led him through the tapestried door and down the passageway.

The light was, in fact, perfect, and the picture shone with an inner radiancy, as though a lamp burned behind the soft screen of the lady's flesh. Every detail of the foreground detached itself with jewel-like precision. Wyant noticed a dozen accessories which had escaped him on the previous day.

He drew out his note-book, and the doctor, who had dropped his sardonic grin for a look of devout contemplation, pushed a chair forward, and seated himself on a carved settle against the wall.

"Now, then," he said, "tell Clyde what you can; but the letter killeth."

He sank down, his hands hanging on the arm of the settle like the claws of a dead bird, his eyes fixed on Wyant's notebook with the obvious intention of detecting any attempt at a surreptitious sketch.

Wyant, nettled at this surveillance, and disturbed by the speculations which Doctor Lombard's strange household excited, sat motionless for a few minutes, staring first at the picture and then at the blank pages of the note-book. The thought that Doctor Lombard was enjoying his discomfiture at length roused him, and he began to write.

He was interrupted by a knock on the iron door. Doctor Lombard

rose to unlock it, and his daughter entered.

She bowed hurriedly to Wyant, without looking at him.

"Father, had you forgotten that the man from Monte Amiato was to coming back this morning with an answer about the bas-relief? He is here now; he says he can't wait."

"The devil!" cried her father impatiently. "Didn't you tell him—"

"Yes; but he says he can't come back. If you want to see him you must come now."

"Then you think there's a chance?—"

She nodded.

He turned and looked at Wyant, who was writing assiduously.

"You will stay here, Sybilla; I shall be back in a moment." He hurried out, locking the door behind him.

Wyant had looked up, wondering if Miss Lombard would show any surprise at being locked in with him; but it was his turn to be surprised, for hardly had they heard the key withdrawn when she moved close to him, her small face pale and tumultuous.

"I arranged it—I must speak to you," she gasped. "He'll be back in five minutes."

Her courage seemed to fail, and she looked at him helplessly.

Wyant had a sense of stepping among explosives. He glanced about him at the dusky vaulted room, at the haunting smile of the strange picture overhead, and at the pink-and-white girl whispering of conspiracies in a voice meant to exchange platitudes with a curate.

"How can I help you?" he said with a rush of compassion.

"Oh, if you would! I never have a chance to speak to any one; it's so difficult—he watches me—he'll be back immediately."

"Try to tell me what I can do."

"I don't dare; I feel as if he were behind me." She turned away, fixing her eyes on the picture. A sound startled her. "There he comes, and I haven't spoken! It was my only chance; but it bewilders me so to be hurried."

"I don't hear any one," said Wyant, listening. "Try to tell me."

"How can I make you understand? It would take so long to explain." She drew a deep breath, and then with a plunge—"Will you come here again this afternoon—at about five?" she whispered.

"Come here again?"

"Yes—you can ask to see the picture,—make some excuse. He will come with you, of course; I will open the door for you—and—and lock you both in"—she gasped.

"Lock us in?"

"You see? You understand? It's the only way for me to leave the house—if I am ever to do it"—She drew another difficult breath. "The key will be returned—by a safe person—in half an hour,—perhaps sooner—"

She trembled so much that she was obliged to lean against the settle for support.

Wyant looked at her steadily; he was very sorry for her. "I can't, Miss Lombard," he said at length.

"You can't?"

"I'm sorry; I must seem cruel; but consider—"

He was stopped by the futility of the word: as well ask a hunted rabbit to pause in its dash for a hole!

Wyant took her hand; it was cold and nerveless.

"I will serve you in any way I can; but you must see that this way is impossible. Can't I talk to you again? Perhaps—"

"Oh," she cried, starting up, "there he comes!"

Doctor Lombard's step sounded in the passage.

Wyant held her fast. "Tell me one thing: he won't let you sell the picture?"

"No—hush!"

"Make no pledges for the future, then; promise me that."

"The future?"

"In case he should die: your father is an old man. You haven't promised?"

She shook her head.

"Don't, then; remember that."

She made no answer, and the key turned in the lock.

As he passed out of the house, its scowling cornice and façade of ravaged brick looked down on him with the startlingness of a strange face, seen momentarily in a crowd, and impressing itself on the brain as part of an inevitable future. Above the doorway, the marble hand reached out like the cry of an imprisoned anguish.

Wyant turned away impatiently.

"Rubbish!" he said to himself. "*She* isn't walled in; she can get out if she wants to."

IV

Wyant had any number of plans for coming to Miss Lombard's aid: he was elaborating the twentieth when, on the same afternoon, he stepped into the express train for Florence. By the time the train reached Certaldo he was convinced that, in thus hastening his departure, he had followed the only reasonable course; at Empoli, he began to reflect that the priest and the Levite had probably justified themselves in much the same manner.

A month later, after his return to England, he was unexpectedly relieved from these alternatives of extenuation and approval. A paragraph in the morning paper announced the sudden death of Doctor Lombard, the distinguished English dilettante who had long resided in Siena. Wyant's justification was complete. Our blindest impulses become evidence of perspicacity when they fall in with the course of events.

Wyant could now comfortably speculate on the particular complications from which his foresight had probably saved him. The climax was unexpectedly dramatic. Miss Lombard, on the brink of a step which, whatever its issue, would have burdened her with retrospective compunction, had been set free before her suitor's ardor could have had time to cool, and was now doubtless planning a life of domestic felicity on the proceeds of the Leonardo. One thing,

however, struck Wyant as odd—he saw no mention of the sale of the picture. He had scanned the papers for an immediate announcement of its transfer to one of the great museums; but presently concluding that Miss Lombard, out of filial piety, had wished to avoid an appearance of unseemly haste in the disposal of her treasure, he dismissed the matter from his mind. Other affairs happened to engage him; the months slipped by, and gradually the lady and the picture dwelt less vividly in his mind.

It was not till five or six years later, when chance took him again to Siena, that the recollection started from some inner fold of memory. He found himself, as it happened, at the head of Doctor Lombard's street, and glancing down that grim thoroughfare, caught an oblique glimpse of the doctor's house front, with the Dead Hand projecting above its threshold.

The sight revived his interest, and that evening, over an admirable *frittata*, he questioned his landlady about Miss Lombard's marriage.

"The daughter of the English doctor? But she has never married, signore."

"Never married? What, then, became of Count Ottaviano?"

"For a long time he waited; but last year he married a noble lady of the Maremma."

"But what happened—why was the marriage broken?"

The landlady enacted a pantomime of baffled interrogation.

"And Miss Lombard still lives in her father's house?"

"Yes, signore; she is still there."

"And the Leonardo—"

"The Leonardo, also, is still there."

The next day, as Wyant entered the House of the Dead Hand, he remembered Count Ottaviano's injunction to ring twice, and smiled mournfully to think that so much subtlety had been vain. But what could have prevented the marriage? If Doctor Lombard's death had been long delayed, time might have acted as a dissolvent, or the young lady's resolve have failed; but it seemed impossible that the

white heat of ardor in which Wyant had left the lovers should have cooled in a few short weeks.

As he ascended the vaulted stairway the atmosphere of the place seemed a reply to his conjectures. The same numbing air fell on him, like an emanation from some persistent willpower, a something fierce and imminent which might reduce to impotence every impulse within its range. Wyant could almost fancy a hand on his shoulder, guiding him upward with the ironical intent of confronting him with the evidence of its work.

A strange servant opened the door, and he was presently introduced to the tapestried room, where, from their usual seats in the window, Mrs. Lombard and her daughter advanced to welcome him with faint ejaculations of surprise.

Both had grown oddly old, but in a dry, smooth way, as fruits might shrivel on a shelf instead of ripening on the tree. Mrs. Lombard was still knitting, and pausing now and then to warm her swollen hands above the brazier; and Miss Lombard, in rising, had laid aside a strip of needle-work which might have been the same on which Wyant had first seen her engaged.

Their visitor inquired discreetly how they had fared in the interval, and learned that they had thought of returning to England, but had somehow never done so.

"I am sorry not to see my aunts again," Mrs. Lombard said resignedly; "but Sybilla thinks it best that we should not go this year."

"Next year, perhaps," murmured Miss Lombard, in a voice which seemed to suggest that they had a great waste of time to fill.

She had returned to her seat, and sat bending over her work. Her hair enveloped her head in the same thick braids, but the rose color of her cheeks had turned to blotches of dull red, like some pigment which has darkened in drying.

"And Professor Clyde—is he well?" Mrs. Lombard asked affably; continuing, as her daughter raised a startled eye: "Surely, Sybilla,

Mr. Wyant was the gentleman who was sent by Professor Clyde to see the Leonardo?"

Miss Lombard was silent, but Wyant hastened to assure the elder lady of his friend's well-being.

"Ah—perhaps, then, he will come back some day to Siena," she said, sighing. Wyant declared that it was more than likely; and there ensued a pause, which he presently broke by saying to Miss Lombard: "And you still have the picture?"

She raised her eyes and looked at him. "Should you like to see it?" she asked.

On his assenting, she rose, and extracting the same key from the same secret drawer, unlocked the door beneath the tapestry. They walked down the passage in silence, and she stood aside with a grave gesture, making Wyant pass before her into the room. Then she crossed over and drew the curtain back from the picture.

The light of the early afternoon poured full on it: its surface appeared to ripple and heave with a fluid splendor. The colors had lost none of their warmth, the outlines none of their pure precision; it seemed to Wyant like some magical flower which had burst suddenly from the mould of darkness and oblivion.

He turned to Miss Lombard with a movement of comprehension.

"Ah, I understand—you couldn't part with it, after all!" he cried.

"No—I couldn't part with it," she answered.

"It's too beautiful,—too beautiful,"—he assented.

"Too beautiful?" She turned on him with a curious stare. "I have never thought it beautiful, you know."

He gave back the stare. "You have never—"

She shook her head. "It's not that. I hate it; I've always hated it. But he wouldn't let me—he will never let me now."

Wyant was startled by her use of the present tense. Her look surprised him, too: there was a strange fixity of resentment in her innocuous eye. Was it possible that she was laboring under some delusion? Or did the pronoun not refer to her father?

"You mean that Doctor Lombard did not wish you to part with the picture?"

"No—he prevented me; he will always prevent me."

There was another pause. "You promised him, then, before his death—"

"No; I promised nothing. He died too suddenly to make me." Her voice sank to a whisper. "I was free—perfectly free—or I thought I was till I tried."

"Till you tried?"

"To disobey him—to sell the picture. Then I found it was impossible. I tried again and again; but he was always in the room with me."

She glanced over her shoulder as though she had heard a step; and to Wyant, too, for a moment, the room seemed full of a third presence.

"And you can't"—he faltered, unconsciously dropping his voice to the pitch of hers.

She shook her head, gazing at him mystically. "I can't lock him out; I can never lock him out now. I told you I should never have another chance."

Wyant felt the chill of her words like a cold breath in his hair.

"Oh"—he groaned; but she cut him off with a grave gesture.

"It is too late," she said; "but you ought to have helped me that day."

The Introducers

AT NINE O'CLOCK on an August morning Mr. Frederick Tilney descended the terrace steps of Sea Lodge and strolled across the lawn to the cliffs.

The upper windows of the long white façade above the terrace were all close-shuttered, for at nine o'clock Newport still sleeps and he who is stirring enough to venture forth at that unwonted hour may enjoy what no wealth could buy a little later—the privilege of being alone.

Though Mr. Tilney's habits of life, combined with the elegance of his appearance, declared him to be socially disposed, he was not insensible to the rarer pleasures of self-communion, and on this occasion he found peculiar gratification in the thought of having to himself the whole opulent extent of turf and flower border between Ochre Point and Bailey's Beach. The morning was brilliant, with a blue horizon line pure of fog, and such a sparkle on every leaf and grass blade, and on every restless facet of the ever-moving sea, as would have tempted a less sophisticated fancy to visions of wet bows and a leaping stern, or of woodland climbs up the course of a mountain stream.

But it was so long since Mr. Tilney had found a savor in such innocent diversions, that the unblemished fairness of the morning suggested to him only a lazy well-being associated with escape from social duties, and the chance to finish the French novel over which he had fallen asleep at three o'clock that morning.

It was odd how he was growing to value his rare opportunities of

being alone. He who in his earlier years had depended on the stimulus of companionship as the fagged diner-out depends on the fillip of his first glass of champagne, was now beginning to watch for and cherish every momentary escape from the crowd. It had grown to such a passion with him, this craving to have the world to himself, that he had overcome the habit of late rising, and learned to curtail the complications of his toilet, in order to secure a half hour of solitude before he was caught back into the whizzing social machinery.

“And talk of the solitude of the desert, it’s nothing to the Newport cliffs at this hour,” he mused, as he threw himself down on a shaded seat invitingly placed near the path which follows the shore. “Sometimes I feel as if the sea, and the cliffs, and the skyline out there, were all a part of the stupid show—the expensive stage setting of a rottenly cheap play—to be folded up and packed away with the rest of the rubbish when the performance is over; and it’s good to come out and find it here at this hour, all by itself, and not giving a hang for the ridiculous goings-on of which it happens to be made the temporary background. Well—there’s one comfort: none of the other fools really *see* it—it’s here only for those who seek it out at such an hour—and as I’m the only human being who does, it’s here only for me, and belongs only to me, and not to the impenetrable asses who think they own it because they’ve paid for it at so many thousand dollars a foot!”

And Mr. Tilney, throwing out his chest with the irrepressible pride of possessorship, cast an eye of approval along the windings of the deserted path which skirted the lawn of Sea Lodge and lost itself in the trim shrubberies of the adjoining estate.

“Yes—it’s mine—all mine—and this is the only real possessorship, after all! No fear of intruders at this hour—no need of warning signposts, and polite requests to keep to the path. I don’t suppose anybody ever walked along this path at my hour, and I don’t care who walks here for the rest of the day!” But at this point his

meditations were interrupted by the sight of a white gleam through the adjacent foliage; and a moment later all his theories as to the habits of his neighbors had been rudely shattered by the appearance of a lady who, under the sheltering arch of a wide lace sunshade, was advancing indolently toward his seat.

“Why, you’ve got my bench!” she exclaimed, pausing before him, with merriment and indignation mingling in her eyes as sun and wind contended on the ripples behind her.

“*Your* bench?” echoed Tilney, rising at her approach, and dissembling his annoyance under a fair pretense of hospitality. “If ever I thought anything on earth was mine, it’s this bench.”

The lady, who was young, tall and critical-looking, drew her straight brows together and smilingly pondered his assertion.

“I suppose you thought that because it happens to stand in the grounds of Sea Lodge instead of Cliffwood—we haven’t any benches, by the way; but my theory is a little different, as it happens. I think things belong only to the people who know how to appreciate them.”

“Why, so do I—if the bench isn’t mine, at least the theory is!” Tilney protested.

“Well, it’s mine too, and it makes the bench mine, you see,” the young lady argued with earnestness, “because hitherto I’ve been the only person who appreciated sitting on it at this hour.”

“Ah, hitherto, perhaps—but not since I arrived here last week. I haven’t missed a morning,” Tilney declared.

She smiled. “That explains the misunderstanding. I’ve been away for a week, and before that no one ever ever sat on my bench at this hour.”

“And since then no one has ever ever sat on *my* bench at this hour; but, my dear Miss Grantham,” Tilney gallantly concluded, “I shall be only too honored if you will make the first exception to the rule by sitting on it in my company this morning.”

Miss Grantham was evidently a young lady of judicial temper, for she weighed this assertion as carefully as the other, before

answering, with a slight tinge of condescension: "I don't know that you have any more right to ask me to sit on *my* bench, than I have to ask you to sit on *yours*, but for my part I am magnanimous enough to assume just for once that it's ours."

Tilney bowed his thanks and seated himself at her side. "I realize how magnanimous it is of you," he returned, "for, just as you came round the corner, I was saying to myself that this bench was really the only thing in the world I could call my own——"

"And now I've taken half of it away from you! But then," she rejoined, "you've taken the other half from *me*; and as I was under the same delusion as yourself, we are both in the same situation, and had better accommodate ourselves as best we can to the diminished glory of joint ownership."

"It would be ungrateful of me to reject so reasonable a proposal; but in return for my consent, would you mind telling me how you happen to attach such excessive importance to the ownership of this bench?"

"It isn't the bench alone—it's the bench and the hour. They are the only things I have to myself."

Tilney met her lovely eyes with a look of intelligence. "Ah, that's surprising—very surprising."

"Why so?" she exclaimed, a little resentfully.

"Because it's so exactly my own feeling."

Miss Grantham smiled and caressed the folds of her lace gown. "And is it so surprising that we should happen to have the same feelings?"

"Not in all respects, I trust; but I never suspected you of an inclination for solitude."

She returned his scrutiny with a glance as penetrating. "Well, you don't look like a recluse yourself; yet I think I should have guessed that you sometimes have a longing to be alone."

"A longing? Good heavens, it's a passion, it's becoming a mania!"

"Ah, how well I understand that. It's the only thing that can tear

me from my bed!"

"I confess one doesn't associate you with the sunrise," he said, letting his glance rest with amusement on the intricate simplicity of her apparel.

"And you!" she smiled back at him. "If our friends were to be told that Fred Tilney and Belle Grantham were to be found sitting on the cliffs at nine o'clock in the morning, the day after the Summerton ball——"

"And that they had come there, not to meet each other, but to escape from every one else——"

"Oh, there's the point: that's what makes it interesting. If we're in the same box why shouldn't we be on the same bench?"

"It requires no argument to convince me that we should. But *are* we in the same box? You see I've just come, and when I saw you last night I supposed you were stopping with the Summertons."

She shook her head. "No, I'm next door, at Cliffwood, for the summer."

"At Cliffwood? With the Bixbys?" He glanced at the fantastic chimneys and profusely carved gables which made the neighboring villa rise from its shrubberies like a *pièce montée* from a flower-decked dish.

"Well, why not, if *you're* at Sea Lodge with Mr. Magraw?"

"Oh, I'm only a poor itinerant devil——"

"And what am I but a circulating beauty? Didn't you know I'd gone into the business too? I hope you won't let professional jealousy interfere with our friendship."

"I'm not sure that I can help it, if you've really gone into the business. But when I last saw you—where was it?—oh, in Athens ——"

"Things were different, were they not?" she interposed. "I was sketching and you were archæologizing—do you remember that divine day at Delphi? Not that you took much notice of me, by the way——"

“Wasn’t one warned off the premises by the report that you were engaged to Lord Pytchley?”

She colored, and negligently dropped her sunshade between her eyes and his. “Well, I wasn’t, you see—and my sketches were not good enough to sell. So I’ve taken to this kind of thing instead. But I thought you meant to stick to your digging.”

He hesitated. “I was very keen about it for a time; but I had a touch of the sun out in Greece that summer; and a rich fellow picked me up on his steam yacht and carried me off to the Black Sea and then to a salmon river in Norway. I meant to go back, but I dawdled, and the first thing I knew they put another chap in my place. And now I’m Hutchins Magraw’s secretary.”

He sat staring absently at the distant skyline, and perceiving that he was no longer conscious of her presence she quietly shifted her sunshade and let her eyes rest for a moment on his moody profile.

“Yes—that’s what I call it, too. I’m Mrs. Bixby’s secretary—or Sadie’s, I forget which. But how much writing do you do?”

“Well, not much. The butler attends to the invitations.”

“I merely keep an eye on Sadie’s spelling, and see that she doesn’t sign herself ‘lovingly’ to young men. Mrs. Bixby has no correspondents, and the dinner invitations are engraved.”

“And what are your other duties?”

“Oh, the usual things—reminding Mrs. Bixby not to speak of her husband as *Mr. Bixby*, not to send in her cards when people are at home, not to let the butler say ‘fine claret’ in a sticky whisper in people’s ears, not to speak of town as ‘the city,’ and not to let Mr. Bixby tell what things cost. Mrs. Bixby takes the bit in her teeth at times, but Sadie is such a dear adaptable creature that, when I’ve broken her of trying to relieve her callers of their hats, I shall really have nothing left to do. That habit is hard to eradicate, because she is such a good girl, and it was so carefully inculcated at her finishing school.”

Tilney reflected. “Magraw is a good fellow too. There’s really

nothing to do except to tone him down a little—as you say, one feels as if one didn't earn one's keep."

She flashed round upon him instantly. "Ah, but I didn't say that. I said the ostensible duties were easy—but how about the others?"

He looked at her a little consciously. "What do you mean by the others?"

"I don't know how far you live up to your duties, but I'm horribly conscientious about mine. And of course what we're both paid for is to be introducers," she said.

"Introducers?" He colored slightly and, flinging his arm over the back of the bench, turned to command a fuller view of her face. "Yes, that is what we're paid for, I suppose."

"And that's what I hate about it, don't you?"

"Uncommonly," he assented with emphasis.

"It isn't that the Bixbys are not nice people—they are, deep down, you know—or at least they would be, if they were leading a real life among their real friends. But the very fact that one is abetting them to lead a false life, and renounce and deny their past, and impose themselves on people who wouldn't look at them if it were not for their money, and who rather resent their intrusion as it is—well, if one oughtn't to be paid well for doing such a job as that, I don't know what it is to work for my living!"

Tilney continued to observe with appreciation the dramatic play of feature by means of which she expressed her rising disgust at her task; but when she ended he merely said in a detached tone: "It's charming, how you've preserved your illusions."

"My illusions? Why, I haven't enough left for decency!"

"Oh, yes, you have. About the Bixbys, and what they would be if one hadn't egged them on. Why not say to yourself that, if they were not vulgar at heart, they would never have let themselves be taken in by this kind of humbug?"

"Is that what you say about Mr. Magraw?"

"I've told you that Magraw is a good fellow. But when I ran across

him he was simply aching to see the show, and all I've done is to get him a seat in the front row."

"Yes—but are you not expected to do something more for him?"

"Something more—in what line?"

"Well, I think the Bixbys expect me to make a match for Sadie."

"The deuce they do! Well, we'll marry her to my man."

Miss Grantham uttered a cry of dismay. "Don't suggest it even in joke! Don't you see what a catastrophe it would be?"

"Why should it be a catastrophe?"

"Don't you really see? In the first place we should both be out of a job, and in the second, I should earn the everlasting enmity of the Bixbys. What they want for Sadie is not money but position. Mrs. Bixby tells me that every day."

Tilney received this in meditative silence; then he said with a slight laugh: "Well, if position is all they want, why don't you choose *me* as your candidate?"

Miss Grantham did not echo his laugh; she simply concentrated her gaze on his with a slowly deepening interest before answering: "It's a funny idea—but I believe they might do worse."

Tilney's hilarity increased.

"At any rate," she continued, without noticing it, "there's one thing that you and no one else can do for them, and I really believe that Mrs. Bixby, in her present mood, would be capable of rewarding you with her daughter's hand."

"Good heavens! Then I should have to take a look at Miss Bixby before doing it."

"Oh, Sadie's charming. Didn't you notice her last night at the ball? I managed to smuggle her in, though I couldn't get the others invited. What Mrs. Bixby wants," Miss Grantham earnestly continued, "what she's absolutely sickening for at this moment, is to have Sadie invited to Aline Leicester's little Louis XV. dance tomorrow night. And you are the only person in Newport who can do it. I didn't even have a chance to try—for the very day my invitation

came I happened to meet Aline, and she said at once: 'Belle, I see the Bixbys in your eye; but I don't see them in my ballroom.' After that, I tried a little wire-pulling, but it simply made her more obstinate—you know her latest pose is to snub the new millionaires; and you are the only person who can persuade her to make an exception for the Bixbys. Aline's family feeling is tremendously strong, and every one knows you are her favorite cousin."

Tilney listened attentively to this plea; but when it had ended he said, with a discouraging gesture: "I was just going to try to get an invitation for Magraw!"

"Lump them together, then—it will be just as easy; and if you *should* want Mr. Bixby to do anything for you—such as putting you on to a good tip——"

"Thanks, but I've been put on to too many good tips. If it weren't for the good tips I've had, I should be living like a gentleman on my income."

"Well, you'll make Mrs. Bixby think you the most eligible young man in Newport. And if you could persuade Aline to ask Sadie to the dinner before the dance——"

"Comme vous y allez! What would be my return for that?"

She rose with a charming gesture. "Who knows, after all? Perhaps only the pleasure of doing me a very great favor."

"That settles it. I'll do what I can. But how about getting your costumes at such short notice?"

"Oh, we cabled out to Worth on the chance." She held out her hand for good-by. "If only there were something I could do for *you!*"

"Well, there is, as it happens," he rejoined with a smile. "If I succeed in my attempt, let Magraw dance the cotillon with you at Aline's."

She hesitated, visibly embarrassed. "I should be delighted, of course. I'm engaged already, but that's nothing. Only—I'm going to be horribly frank—the Bixbys are rather a heavy load, and I'm not sure I can carry your friend too!"

"Oh, yes, you can. That's my reason for asking you. You see, I really can't help Magraw much. It takes a woman to give a man a start. Aline will say, 'Oh, bring him, if you choose'—but when he comes she won't take any notice of him, or introduce him to any of the nice women. He was too shy to go to the Summertons' last night—he's really very shy under his loudness—so Aline's dance will be his first appearance in Newport; and if he's seen dancing the cotillon with you, at a little *sauterie* like that, with only a handful of people in the room, why, he's made, and my hard work is over for the season."

She smiled. "If you take a fancy to Sadie, perhaps it's over for life."

"And if *you*—by George! No, I don't think I want you to dance the cotillon with Magraw."

"Why not? Do you grudge me a comfortable home for my old age?"

He stood gazing at her as though for the first time his eyes took in the full measure of her grace.

"No—but I grudge *him* even a cotillon with you."

"Ah, you and I were not made to dance cotillons with one another; or do anything together, except conspire at sunrise for each other's material advancement. And that reminds me—I shan't see you again to-day, for we are going to Narragansett on Mr. Bixby's yacht, and to-night we have a dinner at home. But if you succeed with Aline, will you send me a line in the evening?"

He shook his head as they clasped hands once more. "No; but I'll tell you about it here to-morrow morning."

"Very well—I'll be punctual!" she called out to him, as she sped away through the shrubbery.

II

It was, in fact, Miss Grantham who was first on the scene the next morning; and so eager was she to learn the result of the mission with which she had charged her friend, that, instead of profiting by her few moments of solitude, she sat watching the path and chafing at

Mr. Tilney's delay.

When he arrived, politeness restrained the question on her lips; but his first word was to assure her of his success. "You are to bring Miss Bixby to the dinner," he announced.

"Oh, thank you, thank you—you're wonderful!" she exclaimed; "and if there's anything in the world I can do——" She paused suddenly, remembering her side of the compact, and added with nobility: "If it is of any possible advantage to Mr. Magraw to make my acquaintance, I shall be very glad——"

She had already observed in Tilney a marked depression of manner, which even this handsome reaffirmation of her purpose did not dispel.

"Oh," he merely said, "I did not mean to hold you so closely to your bargain——" and with that he seated himself at her side, and lapsed into a state of dumb preoccupation.

Miss Grantham suffered this as long as it was possible for a young lady of spirit to endure; then she determined to make Mr. Tilney aware of her presence by withdrawing it.

"I am afraid," she said, rising with a smile, "that, though you welcomed me so handsomely yesterday, my being here seriously interferes with your enjoyment of the hour, and I am going to propose a compromise. Since it is agreed that we are joint proprietors of this bench, and entitled to an equal share of its advantages, and since our sitting on it together practically negatives those advantages, I suggest that we occupy it on alternate mornings—and to show my gratitude for the favor you have done me, I will set the example by withdrawing to-day."

Tilney met her smile with a look of unrelieved melancholy. "I don't wonder," he said, "that you find solitude less oppressive than my company; but since our purpose in seeking this bench is to snatch an hour's quiet enjoyment, and since enjoyment of any sort is impossible to me to-day, it is obviously you who are entitled to remain here, and I who ought to take myself away." And he held out

his hand in farewell.

Miss Grantham detained it in hers. "To have you surrender your rights because you are too miserable to enjoy them, leaves me with no heart to profit by my own; and if you wish me to remain you must stay also, and tell me what it is that troubles you."

She reseated herself as she spoke, and Tilney, with a deprecating gesture, resumed his place at her side.

"My dear Miss Grantham, the subject is too trifling to mention; I was only trying to calculate how long one could live in Venice on a hundred dollars."

"Why in Venice—and why a hundred dollars?"

"Because, when my passage is paid, it will be all the ready money I possess, and I have always heard that one could live very moderately in Venice."

Miss Grantham flushed and threw a quick glance at him. "You're not thinking of deserting?" she cried, reproachfully.

The young man returned her look. "Deserting—whom?" he inquired.

"Well, me, if you choose! You can't think the comfort it's been to me, since yesterday, to know that there were two of us. I understand now how humane it is to chain convicts together!"

Tilney considered this with a faint smile. "How long have you been at it?" he asked.

"At the Bixbys? I joined them last April in Paris."

"Ah, well—I've been six months with Magraw. It wasn't so bad when we were yachting and knocking about the world—but since we've taken to society it has become unendurable."

"Yes. I didn't mind ordering the Bixbys' dresses as much as I mind providing opportunities for their wearing them."

"I don't so much mind trotting Magraw about—though you know it's nonsense about your having to dance with him this evening——"

"No matter about that. What is it that bothers you?"

"The whole preposterous situation. Magraw's the best fellow in the

world—but there are moments when he takes me for the butler.”

“Oh, I know,” she sympathized. “Mrs. Bixby——”

“That isn’t the worst, though: it’s the reaction. He took me for the butler yesterday afternoon—and in the evening I found a ruby scarf pin on my dressing table.”

But her sympathy was ready for any demand on it. “I know, I know——” she reiterated: and then, breaking off, she added with a mounting color: “You know I couldn’t go to the dance to-night if Mrs. Bixby didn’t pay for my dress.”

“Oh, the cases are not the same; and it’s different for a woman.”

“Why are the cases not the same? And why should I not be humiliated by what humiliates you?”

He shrugged his shoulders ironically. “I’m not humiliated by anything that poor Magraw does to me: I’m humiliated by what I do to *him*!”

“What you do?”

“Yes. What right have I to behave like a gentleman, and return his scarf pins?”

“At least you do return them! And I can’t return the dresses. Oh, it’s detestable either way!” she exclaimed.

“Yes, especially when one succumbs to the weakness of hating *them* instead of one’s self. I hate Magraw this morning,” he confessed.

She rose with an impatient glance at her watch. “Dear me, I must go. I promised Sadie to see the dressmaker at half-past nine: she’s coming to alter our fancy dresses. You see I felt sure you would get Sadie’s invitation. I want you to know her,” she continued. “She’s really a very nice girl. I should like her immensely if I didn’t have to accept so many favors from her.”

“Ah, you’ve just expressed my feeling about Magraw. I really should like your opinion of him,” he added.

“Well, you shall have it—to-morrow morning.”

“Here?” he rejoined with sudden interest.

“Why not? You know I mean to dance with him this evening.”

The morning after the dance it was Miss Grantham's turn to arrive late at the tryst; and when she did so, it was with the air of having a duty to discharge rather than a pleasure to enjoy.

"Mr. Tilney," she said, advancing resolutely to the bench on which he sat awaiting her, "my only object in coming this morning is——"

He rose with extended hand. "To let me thank you. I hope, for the generous way in which you fulfilled your share of the compact? It was awfully good of you to be so nice to Magraw."

She colored vividly, but held his gaze. "As it happens, I *liked* Mr. Magraw. But if I had known the means you had used to obtain his invitation——"

Tilney colored in turn, but they continued to face each other boldly.

"Did Aline betray me? How like a woman!" he exclaimed.

"I can quite understand," Miss Grantham witheringly continued, "the importance you attached to having Mr. Magraw invited to your cousin's dance. *You had to make some return for the scarf pin.* But to use my name as a pretext—to tell Aline Leicester that I was trying to marry Mr. Magraw!"

"Oh, I didn't say *trying*—I said you meant to," Tilney corrected.

"As if that made it any better! To let that man think——"

"He'll never hear of it; and you don't seem to realize that it's not easy to extract an invitation from Aline."

"I don't know that it was absolutely necessary that Mr. Magraw should receive one!"

Tilney, at this, raised his head with a challenging air. "You appeared to think it absolutely necessary that Miss Bixby should."

"Well—I don't see——"

"You don't see how I got *hers*? I dare say you'll think the same method is even more objectionable when the situation is reversed ——"

She stared at him with growing disapproval. "You don't mean to say that you let Aline think you wanted to marry Sadie Bixby?"

"I told you there was nothing I wouldn't stoop to. I suppose you think that horribly low."

Her stare resolved itself into a faint sound of laughter. "Good heavens, how enchanted Mrs. Bixby will be!"

"The deuce she will—but of course the joke can easily be explained."

"To whom? To Mrs. Bixby? I'm glad you think so. I should have said it would be difficult."

"Oh, Mrs. Bixby will never hear of it. I told Aline in the strictest confidence——"

"Every one at the dance was congratulating me on my conquest of Mr. Magraw. I don't see why Aline should keep one secret and not the other."

Tilney's brow darkened ominously. "Well, at any rate, I'll soon undeceive Magraw!"

"A thousand thanks. And I suppose you leave it to me to undeceive Sadie? She talked of you all the way home. Of course, you're almost the only decent man she's met."

"Ah, then the remedy is simple enough. You've only to introduce a few others."

"Yes, I've thought of that." Miss Grantham examined him with a cold smile. "But are you quite sure you want me to?"

Tilney met her question with another. "What on earth do you mean?"

"I'm not stupid in such cases, and I could see that Sadie was interested. Did you find her so perfectly impossible?"

"Impossible? I thought her very pretty."

"That's going to the other extreme—but she certainly looked her best last night. Still, before deciding, I should want you to see her by daylight—and without the paint——"

"Oh, she had on very little paint. One could see her own color through it."

"Yes—she has an unfortunate way of getting red——"

“At that age I should call it blushing.”

Miss Grantham’s face grew suddenly stern. “Of course,” she said, “I should never forgive myself if you were only trifling with Sadie——”

Tilney paused. “But if I were in earnest——?” he suggested.

She gazed at him intently for a moment. “After all, I might be saving her from something worse!”

III

For two mornings after that Tilney, to his secret regret, had the bench on the cliffs to himself. On the third morning he was detained indoors somewhat later than usual on pressing business of his employer’s; and when he emerged from the house he was surprised, and considerably dismayed, to find his seat tenanted by the incongruous figure of Mr. Hutchins Magraw.

Given his patron’s unmatutinal habits, and rooted indifference to the beauties of nature, it was impossible to conceive what whim had drawn him to so unlikely a spot at so improbable an hour; and Tilney’s first impulse was to approach the seat, and allay his curiosity by direct inquiry. Hardly, however, had he begun to advance when the flutter of a white skirt through the Cliffwood shrubberies caused him to retreat abruptly into the covert of lilac bushes edging the lawn. It was by a mere accident, of course, that an unknown female, wearing a white gown, happened to be walking along the path from that particular direction. The path was open to the public, and there was no reason to assume any coincidence between——

Tilney drew a sharp breath. Mr. Magraw had risen and was advancing in the direction of the approaching petticoat; and as it was impossible for him to recognize its wearer from where he sat, it was obvious that he expected some one, and that the invisible female was no casual stroller drawn forth by the beauty of the morning. The next moment this conjecture was unpleasantly confirmed; for Miss Grantham emerged from the shrubbery, and placed her hand in Mr. Magraw’s without perceptible surprise. He, then, had also been

expected; and she had actually had the effrontery to select, as the scene of their tryst, the seat which, by every right of friendship, should have been kept sacred to her conversations with Fred Tilney!

“The idea of telling him about my bench!” Resentment of her perfidy was for the moment uppermost in Tilney’s breast, or was, at any rate, the only sentiment to which he chose to give explicit expression. But other considerations surged indignantly beneath it—wonder at woman’s unaccountableness, disgust at her facility, disappointment, above all, that this one little episode, saved from the wreckage of many shattered illusions, should have had so premature and unpoetic an ending.

“Magraw—if only it hadn’t been Magraw!”

He had meant to turn away and reënter the house; but a feeling of mingled curiosity and wretchedness kept him rooted in his hiding place, while he followed with his eyes the broad swaggering back of Mr. Hutchins Magraw, as it attended Miss Grantham’s slender silhouette across the lawn.

“I hadn’t realized how disgustingly fat the man has grown. One would think a fellow with that outline would know better than to rig himself out in a check a foot square, and impale his double chin on the points of that preposterous collar! It’s odd how little the most fastidious women notice such details. If they did, fewer men would make themselves ridiculous. Why are they standing there, looking up at the house? Perhaps, after all, it *was* an accident, their meeting. No—they’re making straight for the bench—by George, I believe they were looking at the house to make sure *I* wasn’t coming! Don’t be alarmed, my dear Miss Grantham, I’ve no desire to interfere with your amusements. I see now, though, why Magraw was in such a hurry to have me balance his bank book this morning. Just a dodge to keep me indoors, of course. It’s beastly bad taste, anyhow, to make a poor devil like me go over a bank book with such an indecently big balance. That’s the kind of thing that makes a man turn socialist. Why the devil should Magraw have all those millions while I—well,

to be sure, poor devil, he needs them all to make up for his other deficiencies. I'd like to see how long Belle Grantham would share that bench with him if it weren't for his bank account! It must be hard work to talk to Magraw at nine o'clock in the morning. I wonder what the deuce she's saying to him?"

The two objects of Tilney's contemplation had by this time settled themselves on the seat which their observer still chose to call his own, and something in their attitudes seemed to announce that theirs was no transient alighting, but the deliberate installation which precedes an earnest talk.

"Well, she could talk to anybody, at any hour of the day or night! That's her trade, poor girl, as much as it is mine. Only I can't see why she should give Magraw *my* particular hour. Now that I've given him such a good start they've plenty of other chances of meeting. But perhaps she's afraid of competition, and wants to clinch the business by this morning interview. Poor girl! How she must hate it at heart! I'll do her the justice to say that if she had enough to keep body and soul together she'd never look at a Magraw. But if this hand-to-mouth life is hard on a man it's ten times worse for a woman—and her day is over sooner, too. Poor girl! No wonder she shrinks at the idea of growing old in such a trade. To see people cooling off, and the newcomers crowding her out—how can I blame her for being afraid to face such a future? Why, I ought to do what I can to help her—but to help her to Magraw! Bah—there's something rotten in our social system; but it isn't her fault, and only a primitive ass of a man would be fool enough to blame her, instead of pitying her as a fellow victim."

At this point Miss Grantham started up with an apprehensive gesture with which Tilney was painfully familiar. "She's had to look at her watch to realize how time was flying! She doesn't seem to find it goes so slowly with Magraw. Perhaps my pity's wasted after all. That's the way she always lingers on after she has said she couldn't possibly stay another minute. Poor Magraw! She's playing him for all

she's worth, and I don't suppose he even knows he's on the hook. Oh, I don't blame her—not in the least!—only I think she might have chosen another place for their meetings. Hardened wretch as I am, I was beginning to have a sentiment for that bench—it would never have occurred to me to sit there with Miss Bixby, for instance. It's queer how a woman's taste deteriorates when she associates with common men—but I mean to let Miss Grantham know that, though she's welcome to Magraw, she can't have my bench into the bargain!"

By this time the couple under observation had completed their lingering adieux, the gentleman returning across the lawn to his house, while the lady retraced her way toward Cliffwood. Tilney remained in concealment while Mr. Magraw strode by within a few feet, the fatuous smile of self-complacency upon his lips; then the young man, emerging behind his patron's back, struck across the lawn and overtook Miss Grantham as she turned into the adjoining grounds.

She paused as she became aware of Tilney's approach, and cast a rapid glance in the direction from which he had come; but he had taken care not to show himself till Magraw had vanished in the shrubberies, and he was quick to note the look of reassurance in Miss Grantham's eyes. She held out her hand, blushing slightly, but self-possessed.

"J'ai failli attendre!" she quoted with an indulgent smile; and the smile had well-nigh stung her companion to immediate retaliation. But he meditated a subtler revenge, and dissembling his resentment, asked innocently: "Have you been here long?"

"It has certainly seemed so," she replied in the same tone.

"Well, at any rate, my involuntary delay has enabled you to enjoy what you originally came out to seek;" and, in reply to her puzzled glance, he added pointedly: "The pleasures of solitude."

Unmoved by the thrust, she turned a smiling look on him. "But what if you have made them lose their flavor?"

"Then it was almost worth my while to have stayed away!"

She held out her hand. "The experiment was so successful that you need not try it again," she said sweetly. "But time flies, and I must hasten back into captivity."

He detained her hand to ask sentimentally: "I hope you are not losing your taste for freedom?" and she replied, as she hastened away: "Come and see—come and see to-morrow!"

He stood in the path where she had left him, and slowly drew from his pocket Mr. Magraw's latest gift—a jeweled cigarette case. He took out the cigarettes, transferred them to his pocket, and then, with a free swing of the arm, Rung their receptacle into the sea.

"Do *you* come and see to-morrow!" he muttered, addressing himself to Miss Grantham's retreating figure; then he lit a cigarette, and walked rapidly back to Sea Lodge.

"I shouldn't have thought it of her!" he said as he entered the house.

IV

Two mornings later Tilney, with a beating heart, descended the terrace of Sea Lodge, and once more directed himself toward the beach on the cliff.

He was not only on time, but a few minutes before the hour; yet it was something of a surprise to him to find the bench still untenanted. He seated himself, lit a cigarette with deliberation, and drew from his pocket a note stamped *Cliffwood* and bearing the date of the previous evening.

"Dear Mr. Tilney," it ran, "much as I dislike to intrude upon the solitude which I know you value so highly, I must ask you to spare me a few moments to-morrow morning; and I send this line in advance in order that my coming may not interfere with *any other arrangements*,

"Yours sincerely,

"BELLE GRANTHAM."

Tilney re-read this note with an air of considerable complacency; then he laid it carefully back in his notecase, and rose to meet Miss Grantham as she made her appearance around the curve of the path.

The morning was chilly, and veiled in a slight haze, too translucent to be called a fog, but perceptible enough to cast a faint grayness over sea and sky. Seen in this tempered light, Miss Grantham's face seemed to lose its usual vivacity and be subdued to the influence of the atmosphere; and her manner of greeting Tilney had the same tinge of soberness.

"I must excuse myself," she began, "for again intruding on your privacy——"

"My privacy?" Tilney gallantly interposed. "Was it not long since understood between us that the privacy of this spot belongs as much to you as to me?"

"Long since—yes," she replied; "but so much has happened in the interval." She paused, and added in a significant tone: "Since I came here yesterday morning, and found you sitting on this bench with Sadie Bixby."

Tilney feigned a successful show of embarrassment. "You came here yesterday morning——?"

"By appointment, as you evidently do *not* remember," she continued coldly. "It is a mistake one does not make twice, and my only object in asking to see you this morning——"

"One moment," Tilney interposed. "Before you go on, I must say in my own defense that I assumed our compact about the use of this seat had been abrogated when I came out the day before yesterday, and found *you* sharing it with Magraw. "

There was no mistaking the effect of this thrust. Her color rose painfully, and she forced a laugh as she replied: "The day before yesterday? Ah, yes—that was the morning you were so late. Mr. Magraw saw me from the house, and took pity on my deserted state."

Tilney colored also at this fresh evidence of her duplicity.

"I beg your pardon—but does not your memory deceive you? It

seemed to me that Magraw was waiting on the bench, and that it was *you* who took pity—if I am not mistaken.”

She drew herself up and flashed an outraged glance at him. “You were watching us, then?” she exclaimed.

“Oh—*watching!* I was merely repairing to our seat at my usual hour.”

“At your usual hour? But Mr. Magraw told me you were not coming—that you would be busy all the morning with some writing ——” She broke off, seeing herself more deeply involved with each word.

“Some writing he had given me to do? Precisely,” Tilney answered with scorn. “Only, he had underrated either my impatience to see you, or my head for figures—or both.”

She received this in an embarrassed silence, and softened by her embarrassment he added: “It is not for me to discuss your arrangements; but I confess I wondered a little that you chose our bench as a meeting-place.”

She hesitated a moment, and then said in a deprecating tone: “It is the only place where I can see anyone alone!”

“And you wished to see Magraw alone?”

Their eyes met defiantly, but hers fell first as she answered: “Yes—I did wish to.”

Tilney bowed ceremoniously. “In that case, of course, nothing remains to be said.”

They had both remained standing during this short colloquy, but she now seated herself and signed to him to do the same.

“Yes—something remains for me to say; and it was for the purpose of saying it that I asked you to meet me this morning.”

Tilney, without replying, placed himself at the opposite end of the bench.

“What I wish to ask,” she continued in a decisive tone, “is your object in meeting Miss Bixby here yesterday.”

The temerity of the question was so surprising to her companion

that for a moment he gazed at her without speaking; then he replied with a faint smile: "If there is any right of priority in such inquiries, perhaps I am entitled to ask first what was your object in meeting Magraw here the day before that."

She repressed her impatience, and returned gently: "The cases are surely not quite alike; but I thought I had already given you my answer."

"That you wished to see him alone? Well, I had the same object in asking Miss Bixby to meet me."

"But you must see that in the case of a young girl—especially a girl as inexperienced as Sadie——"

Tilney raised his hand with a deprecating gesture. "Are you not falling into the conventional mistake of assuming that a man cannot seek to be alone with a young girl except for the purpose of making love to her?"

"Well, what other purpose——?"

He looked at her calmly. "Then it was to promote that purpose that you asked Magraw to meet you here the day before I met Miss Bixby?"

It was Miss Grantham's turn to color, and she fulfilled the obligation handsomely. "I see no object in such cross-questioning ——"

"Ah, pardon me, but it was you who began it."

"It was my duty to question you about Sadie. You can't imagine I do it for my pleasure—but her parents are too inexperienced to protect her."

"To protect her? Then you consider me hopelessly detrimental ——?"

Miss Grantham drew a quick breath. "Why not have told me at once that you wished to marry her? Every one is saying so, of course; but I could not help remembering that your intentions have not always been so——"

"Specific?" he suggested ironically.

"Well, you are still unmarried," she observed.

"Yes," he said musingly. "It takes a pretty varied experience of life to find out that there are worse states than marriage."

Miss Grantham rose with a smile. "Since you *have* found it out," she said generously. "I can congratulate you with perfect sincerity. Sadie is a dear little creature——"

"But too good for me? Is that what you meant to add?"

"No, for when you find out how good she is you'll want to be worthy of her."

He received this in silence, but when she held out her hand for good-by he said: "I wonder if it's not my duty to protect Magraw? He hasn't even an inexperienced parent."

She met his smile steadily, but he felt the sudden resistance of her hand. "Mr. Magraw," she returned, withdrawing it, "would be quite safe if Sadie were."

"If Sadie——?"

She broke into a laugh. "If you're planning to take the bread out of my mouth, I must do something in the way of self-preservation." And as he remained silent, feeling a rather tragic import under her pleasantry, she added wearily: "I can't begin this kind of thing over again—I simply can't!"

Tilney's discouraged gesture showed his comprehension of her words. "To whom do you say it?" he exclaimed.

"Well, then, let us drop phrases, and admit frankly that we're trying to marry each other's wards—or whatever you choose to call them!"

He did not answer, and she continued, with a kind of nervous animation: "And that we'll do all we can—that we *honorably* can—to help each other's plans, and see each other through."

The young man still remained silent, his eyes absently fixed on the line of sea from which the veil of mist was gradually receding; and before he had found a reply a footman, hastening across the lawn from the house, broke in upon his meditations.

“Beg pardon, sir, but Mr. Magraw wishes you to come in immediately, sir, to answer the telephone for him.”

Tilney turned abruptly toward his companion. “By heaven, yes, we’ll see each other through!” he exclaimed.

Though Tilney and Miss Grantham had parted without any reference to future meetings at the same spot, each was now drawn to the bench on the cliffs by a new motive—the not unpardonable desire to see if the other had again extended its hospitality to a third party.

Their mutual reconnoitering did not, for several mornings, carry them farther than the most distant point from which the bench was visible; when, perceiving it to be untenanted, they respectively retreated, without having discovered each other’s manœuvre.

The fifth day, however, was so foggy that distant espionage was impossible; and Tilney’s suspicions having been aroused by the unusual amount of correspondence with which his patron had burdened him overnight, he determined to ascertain by direct inspection if the sanctity of the bench had again been violated. It would have been hard to say why, in his own thoughts, he still applied such terms to the possibility of Miss Grantham’s resorting to the spot in company with her suitor. Tilney fully acquiesced in the inevitableness of the course they had agreed upon; but if his reason accepted the consequences, his sensibilities made the process unpleasant to contemplate. He would have been prepared to append his signature to a matrimonial contract drawn up between Miss Grantham and his employer; but it irritated him that an arrangement so purely utilitarian should be disguised under the charming futilities of courtship.

“The real grossness is not in viewing marriage as a business partnership, but in pretending that one doesn’t,” he summed up, as he crossed the damp lawn with the waves of gray fog coiling around him like a phantom sea.

Through their pale surges he could just discern, as he approached the bench, an indeterminate outline hovering near it; and the outline proclaiming itself, on nearer inspection, as of his own sex, Tilney was about to turn aside when another figure appeared from the direction of Cliffwood.

"It's odd," he mused, trying to philosophize upon his own discomfiture—"it's odd how the fog distorts a silhouette. I could have sworn I should have known hers anywhere, and yet this deceptive vapor—or my nerves, or the two together—make her look so much shorter—and I'll swear I never saw her swing her arm as she walked. I suppose it comes from associating with a bounder like——"

He drew back with a suppressed exclamation as the small feminine outline showed more clearly through a partial break in the fog.

"Why, it looks—no, it can't be! Hanged if I know, she's so bundled up. Well, it's not *she*, at any rate; and if Magraw, at this stage of the proceedings, has the indecency to be meeting other women here, it's almost my duty to the poor girl to let her know before it's too late to break with him."

He was surprised at the immediate sense of lightness which this conclusion produced in him. He was sorry for Miss Grantham, of course, when she'd so nearly landed her man; but, hang it, there were as good fish in the sea—and meanwhile she must, at all costs, be saved from the humiliation of committing herself farther. His first impulse had been the somewhat cruel one of putting the unvarnished facts before her; but farther reflection made him shrink from this course, and cast about for some more humane expedient.

"If she could only be made to think that she can do better than Magraw—and she ought to, with half a chance, poor child! I can't be wholly sorry that she should not be sacrificed to this particular monster—not that Magraw's not a good fellow in himself; I daresay the Minotaur was liked in his own set—but he should have stayed there, that's all."

While engaged in these considerations, Tilney had prudently

withdrawn into the Cliffwood shrubberies; and he was just deciding to effect his escape through the Bixby's grounds, rather than run the chance of being discovered by the tenants of the bench, when, on issuing from his retreat, he beheld the indistinct gleam of a white dress half way down the Cliffwood lawn. This time, even though the fog had thickened, there was no mistaking the form and movement of the shrouded figure; or was it some subtler sense than that of sight that so positively assured him of Miss Grantham's nearness? At any rate, he advanced to meet her without a moment's hesitation, determined to protect her, by whatever expedient, from the embarrassment of interrupting the colloquy on the bench. He had but a moment in which to consider how this should be effected; but it was not the first time he had trusted to his gift of improvisation in delicate situations, and he was now sustained by the unwonted sense of his complete disinterestedness. The progress of his own affairs had in fact made it impossible for him to interfere from personal motives; and he thus had the support of knowing that his intervention was quite unaffected by selfish considerations.

"I'm almost glad," he reflected, "that I *am* committed, if one of the first consequences is to enable me to act as her friend, without any afterthought, or any possibility of her suspecting me of not playing fair. One of my reasons for wanting to settle my own future has always been the desire to help her; and little Sadie is far too good a girl not to understand——"

At this point he found himself face to face with Miss Grantham, who, suddenly discerning him through the fog, drew back with a slight start of surprise.

"I had a feeling that I might meet you this morning," he said in a tone of undisguised pleasure; and even as he spoke, his half-formed plan for her rescue began to dissolve in the glow of happiness which her nearness always produced. He was annoyed to find that his self-control was so completely at the mercy of her presence: but he could no more resist the sudden reaction of his pulses from reason to

feeling than he could dispel the softly enveloping fog which seemed to act as the accomplice of his wishes.

“If I can only make her think she can do better than Magraw,” he kept mechanically repeating to himself; but the only expedient that occurred to him was one which both prudence and honor rejected.

Miss Grantham’s first words threw his ideas into still deeper confusion.

“Mr. Tilney,” she said, without heeding his greeting, “are you, or are you not, engaged to Sadie Bixby?”

The abruptness of the inquiry, and the sternness of her tone, had a not wholly unpleasing effect on the young man; but their only perceptible result was to reduce him to an embarrassed silence.

Miss Grantham gave a faint laugh. “I suppose I may consider myself answered? And in that case, I have only to apologize for asking so indiscreet a question——”

Tilney cleared his throat nervously. “I am not aware that I have either answered your question or shown that I regarded it as indiscreet——”

“Your silence did both,” she returned with some impatience. He made no reply, and after a moment’s pause she added, with a sudden assumption of playfulness: “Well, if this is really to be our last meeting, as I suppose it is—shall we not celebrate it by sitting together for a few moments on our poor dear old bench?”

As she spoke she began to move in the direction of the seat, apparently assuming that her companion would offer no opposition to her proposal. But Tilney, with a vague exclamation, laid his hand on her arm. “Don’t you think it’s rather too damp to sit out of doors?”

He reddened under the laugh with which she met this incongruous objection.

“My poor friend—would she really mind so much? I was foolish enough to think you might give me this last morning——”

“The whole day is at your service,” he interposed nervously, “but

——”

“Ah, yes; there will always be a *but* between us now. No wonder men get on so much better than women; they are so much more prudent! Now, even if I were engaged to Mr. Magraw——” She broke off, and he fancied he could see her flush through the fog.

He turned on her abruptly. “*Are* you? There’s the point!” he exclaimed.

She drew back, slightly disconcerted, but recovering herself at once, added in the same playful tone: “I was about to say that, even if I *were*, I should not feel there was any disloyalty to my future in giving this last hour to *our* past.”

Her light emphasis on the pronoun threw him into a glow of pleasure, through which discretion and foresight loomed as remote as objects in the fog; but when she added, with a half-sad laugh: “I should not hesitate to go back to our bench for the last time——” he broke out, with a fresh leap of apprehension: “Ah, but you couldn’t, if it meant to you what it does to me!”

He had spoken the words at haphazard, snatching at them as the readiest means of diverting her purpose; but once uttered they seemed to fill the whole air, and to create a silence which neither speaker had, for a moment, the courage to fill.

Womanlike, Miss Grantham was the first to recover her self-possession. “I am sure,” she said sweetly, “that we shall both look back often on our quiet morning talks, and I can’t think that the persons with whom our futures may be associated will be defrauded by our treasuring such memories.”

She spoke with a sadness so poignant to Tilney that for a moment he stood without replying, and during the pause she again advanced a few steps nearer to the bench.

The young man broke into a scornful laugh. “*Defrauded?* Good heavens—one can’t defraud people of treasures they are utterly incapable of valuing!”

She caught this up with a vehemence that surprised him. “Oh, do

you feel that too? It's just what I mean," she exclaimed.

"Feel it——?" He stopped before her, blocking her way. "Do you suppose I've felt anything else, night or day, since the accursed day when we agreed——?"

He interrupted himself with a last effort at self-control, and she replied in a low tone of exquisite pleading: "Well, then, if you *do* feel it, why not go back for a moment to our bench?"

Tilney groaned. "Can't we talk as well here? Let us walk a little way—we shall be alone anywhere in this fog." ("Anywhere but on that confounded bench," he mentally added.)

Miss Grantham uttered an ironical exclamation. "Ah, you've promised her, I see. Was it one of the conditions? In that case, of course——"

"There were no conditions—and if there had been——"

"Oh, be careful! I want to talk of our past, and not of our future."

Tilney groaned again. "If only it *could* be our future——Belle, what a beastly bad turn we've done each other, after all!"

"Don't let us talk of the present, either, please." She laid a restraining touch on his arm. "Why should we give each other this pain when it's too late?"

"Too late?" He paused, remembering that, for him at least, it *was* too late; but an irresistible impulse prompted him to add: "If it hadn't been, tell me at least—*would you have dared to*, Belle?"

They stood looking at each other, mysteriously isolated in the magic circle of the fog.

"Dared? I am daring more now—more than I have courage for!" she murmured, half to herself.

The admission had well-nigh broken down the last barriers of Tilney's self-restraint; but at the moment of surrender he suddenly recalled his own state of bondage. He had but to lead Miss Grantham to the bench, and she would find herself free; but when she turned to reward him as liberators expect to be rewarded, with what a sorry countenance must he refuse her gift!

He dropped the hand he had caught in his, and said in a low voice: "You were right just now, and I was wrong. We must not even talk of our past, lest we should be tempted to think of our present or our future. I happen to know that I am not doing anyone a serious wrong in speaking to you as I have; but my own case is different."

"Your own case is different?" Miss Grantham interposed, with a sudden change of voice and expression. "If you think you can make love to me without doing Mr. Magraw a serious wrong, I should like to know why I may not listen to you without——"

Tilney received her attack with a disarming humility. "I said the cases were different, because, in a moment of incredible folly, I have tried to attract the interest of a trustful, affectionate girl——"

Miss Grantham interrupted him with a laugh. "Do you mean that," she asked ironically, "for a description of Sadie Bixby?"

Her tone aroused an incongruous flash of resentment in Tilney. "I see no difficulty," he returned, "in identifying the young lady from my words."

"If you really believe them to apply to her, I cannot see how you can excuse yourself for being here with me at this moment!" She laughed again, and then, to Tilney's surprise, drew nearer, and once more laid her hand on his arm.

"My poor friend, it is I who am the real offender, and not you. Believe me, I would not have let you speak to me as you have to-day, if I had not known—if I had not almost felt it my duty to be kind to you—to do what I could to atone——"

"To be kind to me? To atone? What on earth are you talking about?" exclaimed Tilney, startled by this unexpected echo of his inmost thoughts.

"Alas, it was a foolish impulse, and one which only our old friendship could justify. I forgot for a moment that I was not free, in my desire to prepare you—to console you in advance—for a blow
——"

"A blow? You're not *married*?" burst from Tilney.

She paused, and gazed at him wonderingly but not unkindly.

"I was speaking of yourself—yourself and Sadie. I feel myself so deeply to blame——"

Tilney interrupted her with an air of inexpressible relief. "We're both to blame for abetting each other in such suicidal folly. As if either of us was made to give up life and liberty for a bank-balance! But I don't reproach you; Belle—it was more my fault than yours; and I deserve that I should be the one to pay the penalty!"

"The penalty? The penalty of marrying Sadie?" she breathlessly interposed.

"Of marrying any one but you!" he returned recklessly; and at the retort, a veil of sadness fell suddenly upon her eager face.

"It's too late to think of that now; but if you really feel as you say ____"

Tilney again cut her short. "It's too late for me, I know; but if *you* really feel as you say, thank Heaven, Belle, it's not too late for you!"

She drew back a step, and both paused, as though dazed by the shock of their flying words. But as Tilney again approached her, she raised her hand and said gravely: "I don't know what you mean, but I can explain what *I* mean if you'll only——"

"One moment, please. I can explain, too, if you'll only——"

He caught her hand, and began to lead her hurriedly across the lawn to the bench.

"Only what?" she panted, trying to keep pace with his flying strides: and he called back across his shoulder: "Only come to the bench—and be quick!"

"To the bench? Why, haven't I been trying all this time to take you there?" she cried after him, between tears and laughter.

"Yes; but I didn't know; at least *you* didn't know——"

"Didn't know what?"

"Whom you'd find there!"

She pulled back at this, detaining him forcibly. "Good heavens," she gasped, "do you mean to say that *you've* known all this time?"

“Do you think I should have dared to say what I have if I hadn’t ——?”

“Hadn’t known about Sadie——?”

“*Sadie*? I suppose you mean Magraw?”

“Mr. Magraw?” She stopped short, and snatched her hand away with an indignant gesture.

“Mr. Tilney, who do you think is sitting on that bench?”

He faced around on her with equal indignation. “I don’t *think*: I know. Magraw is sitting there with a woman.”

“You’re utterly mistaken! I happen to know that it’s Sadie Bixby who is sitting there with a man.”

There was a long pause between them, charged with a gradual rush of inner enlightenment; then Tilney suddenly burst into a huge, world-defying laugh.

“Well, then, don’t you see——?”

“I don’t see anything more than if the fog were inside me!” she wailed.

“Don’t you see that Magraw and Miss Bixby must be sitting there together, and that, in that case, nothing remains for you and me but to find a new seat for ourselves?”

The Hermit and the Wild Woman

THE HERMIT lived in a cave in the hollow of a hill. Below him was a glen, with a stream in a coppice of oaks and alders, and across the valley, half a day's journey distant, another hill, steep and bristling, raised against the sky a little walled town with Ghibelline swallow-tails.

When the Hermit was a lad, and lived in the town, the crenellations of the walls had been square-topped, and a Guelf lord had flown his standard from the keep. Then one day a steel-coloured line of men-at-arms rode across the valley, wound up the hill and battered in the gates. Stones and Greek fire rained from the ramparts, shields clashed in the streets, blade sprang at blade in passages and stairways, pikes and lances dripped above huddled flesh, and all the still familiar place was a stew of dying bodies. The boy fled from it in horror. He had seen his father go forth and not come back, his mother drop dead from an arquebuse shot as she leaned from the platform of the tower, his little sister fall with a slit throat across the altar steps of the chapel—and he ran, ran for his life, through the slippery streets, over warm twitching bodies, between legs of soldiers carousing, out of the gates, past burning farms, trampled wheat-fields, orchards stripped and broken, till the still woods received him and he fell face down on the unmutilated earth.

He had no wish to go back. His longing was to live hidden from life. Up the hillside he found a hollow rock, and built before it a porch of boughs bound with withies. He fed on nuts and roots, and on trout caught with his hands under the stones in the stream. He

had always been a quiet boy, liking to sit at his mother's feet and watch the flowers grow under her needle, while the chaplain read the histories of the Desert Fathers from a great silver-clasped volume. He would rather have been bred a clerk and scholar than a knight's son, and his happiest moments were when he served mass for the chaplain in the early morning, and felt his heart flutter up and up like a lark, up and up till it was lost in infinite space and brightness. Almost as happy were the hours when he sat beside the foreign painter who came over the mountains to paint the chapel, and under whose brush celestial faces grew out of the wall as if he had sown some magic seed which flowered while you watched it. With the appearing of every gold-rimmed face the boy felt he had won another friend, a friend who would come and bend above him at night, keeping the ugly visions from his pillow—visions of the gnawing monsters about the church-porch, evil-faced bats and dragons, giant worms and winged bristling hogs, a devil's flock who crept down from the stone-work at night and hunted the souls of sinful children through the town. With the growth of the picture the bright mailed angels thronged so close about the boy's bed that between their interwoven wings not a snout or a claw could force itself; and he would turn over sighing on his pillow, which felt as soft and warm as if it had been lined with down from those sheltering pinions.

All these thoughts came back to him in his cave on the cliff-side. The stillness seemed to enclose him with wings, to fold him away from life and evil. He was never restless or discontented. He loved the long silent empty days, each one as like the other as pearls in a well-matched string. Above all he liked to have time to save his soul. He had been greatly troubled about his soul since a band of Flagellants had passed through the town, showing their gaunt scourged bodies and exhorting the people to turn from soft raiment and delicate fare, from marriage and money-getting and dancing and games, and think only how they might escape the devil's talons and

the great red blaze of hell. For days that red blaze hung on the edge of the boy's thoughts like the light of a burning city across a plain. There seemed to be so many pitfalls to avoid—so many things were wicked which one might have supposed to be harmless. How could a child of his age tell? He dared not for a moment think of anything else. And the scene of sack and slaughter from which he had fled gave shape and distinctness to that blood-red vision. Hell was like that, only a million million times worse. Now he knew how flesh looked when devil's pincers tore it, how the shrieks of the damned sounded, and how roasting bodies smelled. How could a Christian spare one moment of his days and nights from the long long struggle to keep safe from the wrath to come?

Gradually the horror faded, leaving only a tranquil pleasure in the minute performance of his religious duties. His mind was not naturally given to the contemplation of evil, and in the blessed solitude of his new life his thoughts dwelt more and more on the beauty of holiness. His desire was to be perfectly good, and to live in love and charity with his fellows; and how could one do this without fleeing from them?

At first his life was difficult, for in winter he was put to great straits to feed himself; and there were nights when the sky was like an iron vault, and a hoarse wind rattled the oak-wood in the valley, and a fear came on him that was worse than any cold. But in time it became known to his townsfolk and to the peasants in the neighbouring valleys that he had withdrawn to the wilderness to lead a godly life; and after that his worst hardships were over, for pious persons brought him gifts of oil and dried fruit, one good woman gave him seeds from her garden, another spun for him a hodden gown, and others would have brought him all manner of food and clothing, had he not refused to accept anything but for his bare needs. The woman who had given him the seeds showed him also how to build a little garden on the southern ledge of his cliff, and all one summer the Hermit carried up soil from the streamside, and the

next he carried up water to keep his garden green. After that the fear of solitude passed from him, for he was so busy all day that at night he had much ado to fight off the demon of sleep, which Saint Arsenius the Abbot has denounced as the chief foe of the solitary. His memory kept good store of prayers and litanies, besides long passages from the Mass and other offices, and he marked the hours of his day by different acts of devotion. On Sundays and feast days, when the wind was set his way, he could hear the church bells from his native town, and these helped him to follow the worship of the faithful, and to bear in mind the seasons of the liturgical year; and what with carrying up water from the river, digging in the garden, gathering fagots for his fire, observing his religious duties, and keeping his thoughts continually on the salvation of his soul, the Hermit knew not a moment's idleness.

At first, during his night vigils, he had felt a fear of the stars, which seemed to set a cruel watch on him, as though they spied out the frailty of his heart and took the measure of his littleness. But one day a wandering clerk, to whom he chanced to give a night's shelter, explained to him that, in the opinion of the most learned doctors in theology, the stars were inhabited by the spirits of the blessed, and this thought brought great solace to the Hermit. Even on winter nights, when the eagles screamed among the peaks, and he heard the long howl of wolves about the sheep-cotes in the valley, he no longer felt any fear, but thought of those sounds as representing the evil voices of the world, and hugged himself in the seclusion of his cave. Sometimes, to keep himself awake, he composed lauds in honour of Christ and the saints, and they seemed to him so pleasant that he feared to forget them, so after much debate with himself he decided to ask a friendly priest, who sometimes visited him, to write them down; and the priest wrote them on comely sheepskin, which the Hermit dried and prepared with his own hands. When the Hermit saw them written they appeared to him so beautiful that he feared to commit the sin of vanity if he looked at them too often, so he hid

them between two smooth stones in his cave, and vowed that he would take them out only once in the year, at Easter, when our Lord has risen and it is meet that Christians should rejoice. And this vow he faithfully kept; but, alas, when Easter drew near, he found he was looking forward to the blessed festival less because of our Lord's rising than because he should then be able to read his pleasant lauds written on fair sheepskin; and thereupon he took a vow that he would not look on the lauds till he lay dying.

So the Hermit, for many years, lived to the glory of God and in great peace of mind.

II

One day he resolved to set forth on a visit to the Saint of the Rock, who lived on the other side of the mountains. Travellers had brought the Hermit report of this solitary, how he lived in holiness and austerity in a desert place among the hills, where snow lay all winter, and in summer the sun beat down cruelly. The Saint, it appeared, had vowed that he would withdraw from the world to a spot where there was neither shade nor water, lest he should be tempted to take his ease and think less continually upon his Maker; but wherever he went he found a spreading tree or a gushing fountain, till at last he climbed to the bare heights where nothing grows, and where the only water comes from the melting of the snow in spring. Here he found a tall rock rising from the ground, and in it he scooped a hollow with his own hands, labouring for five years and wearing his fingers to the bone. Then he seated himself in the hollow, which faced the west, so that in winter he should have small warmth of the sun and in summer be consumed by it; and there he had sat without moving for years beyond number.

The Hermit was greatly drawn by the tale of such austerities, which in his humility he did not dream of emulating, but desired, for his soul's good, to contemplate and praise; so one day he bound sandals to his feet, cut an alder staff from the stream, and set out to

visit the Saint of the Rock.

It was the pleasant season when seeds are shooting and the bud is on the tree. The Hermit was troubled at the thought of leaving his plants without water, but he could not travel in winter by reason of the snows, and in summer he feared the garden would suffer even more from his absence. So he set out, praying that rain might fall while he was away, and hoping to return again in five days. The peasants in the fields left their work to ask his blessing; and they would even have followed him in great numbers had he not told them that he was bound on a pilgrimage to the Saint of the Rock, and that it behooved him to go alone, as one solitary seeking another. So they respected his wish, and he went on and entered the forest. In the forest he walked for two days and slept for two nights. He heard the wolves crying, and foxes rustling in the covert, and once, at twilight, a shaggy brown man peered at him through the leaves and galloped away with a soft padding of hoofs; but the Hermit feared neither wild beasts nor evildoers, nor even the fauns and satyrs who linger in unhallowed forest depths where the Cross has not been raised; for he said: "If I die, I die to the glory of God, and if I live, it must be to the same end." Only he felt a secret pang at the thought that he might die without seeing his lauds again. But the third day, without misadventure, he came out on another valley.

Then he began to climb the mountain, first through brown woods of beech and oak, then through pine and broom, and then across red stony ledges where only a pinched growth of lentisk and briar spread over the bald rock. By this time he thought to have reached his goal, but for two more days he fared on through the same scene, the sky close over him and the green earth receding far below. Sometimes for hours he saw only the red glistening slopes tufted with thin bushes, and the hard blue heaven so close that it seemed his hand could touch it; then at a turn of the path the rocks rolled apart, the eye plunged down a long pine-clad defile, and beyond it the forest flowed away to a plain shining with cities and another mountain-

range many days' journey away. To some eyes this would have been a terrible spectacle, reminding the wayfarer of his remoteness from his kind, and of the perils which lurk in waste places and the weakness of man against them; but the Hermit was so mated to solitude, and felt such love for all created things, that to him the bare rocks sang of their Maker and the vast distance bore witness to His greatness. So His servant journeyed on unafraid.

But one morning, after a long climb over steep and difficult slopes, the wayfarer halted at a bend of the way; for below him was no plain shining with cities, but a bare expanse of shaken silver that reached to the rim of the world; and the Hermit knew it was the sea. Fear seized him then, for it was terrible to see that great plain move like a heaving bosom, and, as he looked on it, the earth seemed also to heave beneath him. But presently he remembered how Christ had walked the waves, and how even Saint Mary of Egypt, a great sinner, had crossed the waters of Jordan dry-shod to receive the Sacrament from the Abbot Zosimus; and then the Hermit's heart grew still, and he sang as he went down the mountain: "The sea shall praise Thee, O Lord."

All day he kept seeing it and then losing it; but toward night he came to a cleft of the hills, and lay down in a pinewood to sleep. He had now been six days gone, and once and again he thought anxiously of his herbs; but he said to himself: "What though my garden perish, if I see a holy man face to face and praise God in his company?" So he was never long cast down.

Before daylight he was afoot under the stars; and leaving the wood where he had slept, began climbing the face of a tall cliff, where he had to clutch the jutting ledges with his hands, and with every step he gained, a rock seemed thrust forth to hurl him back. So, footsore and bleeding, he reached a high stony plain as the sun dropped to the sea; and in the red light he saw a hollow rock, and the Saint sitting in the hollow.

The Hermit fell on his knees, praising God; then he rose and ran

across the plain to the rock. As he drew near he saw that the Saint was a very old man, clad in goat-skin, with a long white beard. He sat motionless, his hands on his knees, and two red eye-sockets turned to the sunset. Near him was a young boy in skins who brushed the flies from his face; but they always came back, and settled on the rheum from his eyes.

He did not appear to hear or see the approach of the Hermit, but sat quite still till the boy said: "Father, here is a pilgrim."

Then he lifted up his voice and asked angrily who was there and what the stranger sought.

The Hermit answered: "Father, the report of your holy practices came to me a long way off, and being myself a solitary, though not worthy to be named with you for godliness, it seemed fitting that I should cross the mountains to visit you, that we might sit together and speak in praise of solitude."

The Saint replied: "You fool, how can two sit together and praise solitude, since by so doing they put an end to the thing they praise?"

The Hermit, at that, was sorely abashed, for he had thought his speech out on the way, reciting it many times over; and now it appeared to him vainer than the crackling of thorns under a pot.

Nevertheless he took heart and said: "True, Father; but may not two sinners sit together and praise Christ, who has taught them the blessings of solitude?"

But the other only answered: "If you had really learned the blessings of solitude you would not squander them in idle wandering." And, the Hermit not knowing how to reply, he said again: "If two sinners meet they can best praise Christ by going each his own way in silence."

After that he shut his lips and continued motionless while the boy brushed the flies from his eye-sockets; but the Hermit's heart sank, and for the first time he felt the weariness of the way he had travelled, and the great distance dividing him from home.

He had meant to take counsel with the Saint concerning his lauds,

and whether he ought to destroy them; but now he had no heart to say more, and turning away he began to go down the mountain. Presently he heard steps running at his back, and the boy came up and pressed a honey-comb on him.

“You have come a long way and must be hungry,” he said; but before the Hermit could thank him he hastened back to his task. So the Hermit crept down the mountain till he reached the wood where he had slept before; and there he made his bed again, but he had no mind to eat before sleeping, for his heart hungered more than his body; and his tears made the honey-comb bitter.

III

On the fourteenth day he came to his own valley and saw the walls of his native town against the sky. He was footsore and heavy of heart, for his long pilgrimage had brought him only weariness and humiliation, and as no drop of rain had fallen he knew that his garden must have perished. So he climbed the cliff heavily and reached his cave at the angelus.

But there a wonder awaited him. For though the scant earth of the hillside was parched and crumbling, his garden-soil shone with moisture, and his plants had shot up, fresh and glistening, to a height they had never attained. More wonderful still, the tendrils of the gourd had been trained about his door; and kneeling down he saw that the earth had been loosened between the rows of sprouting vegetables, and that every leaf dripped as though the rain had but newly ceased. Then it appeared to the Hermit that he beheld a miracle, but doubting his own deserts he refused to believe himself worthy, and went within doors to ponder on what had befallen him. And on his bed of rushes he saw a young woman sleeping, clad in an outlandish garment with strange amulets about her neck.

The sight was full of fear to the Hermit, for he recalled how often the demon, in tempting the Desert Fathers, had taken the form of a woman; but he reflected that, since there was nothing pleasing to

him in the sight of this female, who was brown as a nut and lean with wayfaring, he ran no great danger in looking at her. At first he took her for a wandering Egyptian, but as he looked he perceived, among the heathen charms, an Agnus Dei in her bosom; and this so surprised him that he bent over and called on her to wake.

She sprang up with a start, but seeing the Hermit's gown and staff, and his face above her, lay quiet and said: "I have watered your garden daily in return for the beans and oil that I took from your store."

"Who are you, and how come you here?" asked the Hermit.

She said: "I am a wild woman and live in the woods."

And when he pressed her again to tell him why she had sought shelter in his cave, she said that the land to the south, whence she came, was full of armed companies and bands of marauders, and that great license and bloodshed prevailed there; and this the Hermit knew to be true, for he had heard of it on his homeward journey. The Wild Woman went on to tell him that she had been hunted through the woods like an animal by a band of drunken men-at-arms, Landsknechts from the north by their barbarous dress and speech, and at length, starving and spent, had come on his cave and hidden herself from her pursuers. "For," she said, "I fear neither wild beasts nor the woodland people, charcoal burners, Egyptians, wandering minstrels or chapmen; even the highway robbers do not touch me, because I am poor and brown; but these armed men flown with wine are more terrible than wolves and tigers."

And the Hermit's heart melted, for he thought of his little sister lying with her throat slit across the altar, and of the scenes of blood and rapine from which he had fled into the wilderness. So he said to the stranger that it was not fitting he should house her in his cave, but that he would send a messenger to the town, and beg a pious woman there to give her lodging and work in her household. "For," said he, "I perceive by the blessed image about your neck that you are not a heathen wilding, but a child of Christ, though so far astray

in the desert.”

“Yes,” she said, “I am a Christian, and know as many prayers as you; but I will never set foot in city walls again, lest I be caught and put back into the convent.”

“What,” cried the Hermit with a start, “you are a runagate nun?” And he crossed himself, and again thought of the demon.

She smiled and said: “It is true I was once a cloistered woman, but I will never willingly be one again. Now drive me forth if you like; but I cannot go far, for I have a wounded foot, which I got in climbing the cliff with water for your garden.” And she pointed to a cut in her foot.

At that, for all his fear, the Hermit was moved to pity, and washed the cut and bound it up; and as he did so he bethought him that perhaps his strange visitor had been sent to him not for his soul’s undoing but for her own salvation. And from that hour he yearned to save her.

But it was not fitting that she should remain in his cave; so, having given her water to drink and a handful of lentils, he raised her up, and putting his staff in her hand guided her to a hollow not far off in the face of the cliff. And while he was doing this he heard the sunset bells across the valley, and set about reciting the *Angelus Domini nuntiavit Mariæ*; and she joined in piously, her hands folded, not missing a word.

Nevertheless the thought of her wickedness weighed on him, and the next day when he went to carry her food he asked her to tell him how it came about that she had fallen into such abominable sin. And this is the story she told.

IV

I was born (said she) in the north country, where the winters are long and cold, where snow sometimes falls in the valleys, and the high mountains for months are white with it. My father’s castle is in a tall green wood, where the winds always rustle, and a cold river

runs down from the ice-gorges. South of us was the wide plain, glowing with heat, but above us were stony passes where eagles nest and the storms howl; in winter fires roared in our chimneys, and even in summer there was always a cool air off the gorges. But when I was a child my mother went southward in the great Empress's train and I went with her. We travelled many days, across plains and mountains, and saw Rome, where the Pope lives in a golden palace, and many other cities, till we came to the great Emperor's court. There for two years or more we lived in pomp and merriment, for it was a wonderful court, full of mimes, magicians, philosophers and poets; and the Empress's ladies spent their days in mirth and music, dressed in light silken garments, walking in gardens of roses, and bathing in a cool marble tank, while the Emperor's eunuchs guarded the approach to the gardens. Oh, those baths in the marble tank, my Father! I used to lie awake through the whole hot southern night, and think of that plunge at sunrise under the last stars. For we were in a burning country, and I pined for the tall green woods and the cold stream of my father's valley; and when I had cooled my body in the tank I lay all day in the scant cypress shade and dreamed of my next bath.

My mother pined for the coolness till she died; then the Empress put me in a convent and I was forgotten. The convent was on the side of a bare yellow hill, where bees made a hot buzzing in the thyme. Below was the sea, blazing with a million shafts of light; and overhead a blinding sky, which reflected the sun's glitter like a huge baldric of steel. Now the convent was built on the site of an old pleasure-house which a holy princess had given to our Order; and a part of the house was left standing, with its court and garden. The nuns had built all about the garden; but they left the cypresses in the middle, and the long marble tank where the Princess and her ladies had bathed. The tank, however, as you may conceive, was no longer used as a bath, for the washing of the body is an indulgence forbidden to cloistered virgins; and our Abbess, who was famed for

her austerities, boasted that, like holy Sylvia the nun, she never touched water save to bathe her finger-tips before receiving the Sacrament. With such an example before them, the nuns were obliged to conform to the same pious rule, and many, having been bred in the convent from infancy, regarded all ablutions with horror, and felt no temptation to cleanse the filth from their flesh; but I, who had bathed daily, had the freshness of water in my veins, and perished slowly for want of it, like your garden herbs in a drought.

My cell did not look on the garden, but on the steep mule-path leading up the cliff, where all day long the sun beat as with flails of fire, and I saw the sweating peasants toil up and down behind their thirsty asses, and the beggars whining and scraping their sores. Oh, how I hated to look out on that burning world! I used to turn away from it, sick with disgust, and lying on my hard bed, stare up by the hour at the ceiling of my cell. But flies crawled in hundreds on the ceiling, and the hot noise they made was worse than the glare. Sometimes, at an hour when I knew myself unobserved, I tore off my stifling gown, and hung it over the grated window, that I might no longer see the shaft of sunlight lying across my cell, and the dust dancing in it like fat in the fire. But the darkness choked me, and I struggled for breath as though I lay at the bottom of a pit; so that at last I would spring up, and dragging down the dress, fling myself on my knees before the Cross, and entreat our Lord to give me the gift of holiness, that I might escape the everlasting fires of hell, of which this heat was a foretaste. For if I could not endure the scorching of a summer's day, with what constancy could I meet the thought of the flame that dieth not?

This longing to escape the heat of hell made me apply myself to a devouter way of living, and I reflected that if my bodily distress were somewhat eased I should be able to throw myself with greater zeal into the practice of vigils and austerities. And at length, having set forth to the Abbess that the sultry air of my cell induced in me a grievous heaviness of sleep, I prevailed on her to lodge me in that

part of the building which overlooked the garden.

For a few days I was happy, for instead of the dusty mountainside, and the sight of the sweating peasants and their asses, I looked out on dark cypresses and rows of budding vegetables. But presently I found I had not bettered myself. For with the approach of midsummer the garden, being all enclosed with buildings, grew as stifling as my cell. All the green things in it withered and dried off, leaving trenches of bare red earth, across which the cypresses cast strips of shade too narrow to cool the aching heads of the nuns; and I began to think sorrowfully of my former cell, where now and then there came a sea-breeze, hot and languid, yet alive, and where at least I could look out on the sea. But this was not the worst; for when the dog-days came I found that the sun, at a certain hour, cast on the ceiling of my cell the reflection of the ripples on the garden-tank; and to say how I suffered from this sight is not within the power of speech. It was indeed agony to watch the clear water rippling and washing above my head, yet feel no solace of it on my limbs: as though I had been a senseless brazen image lying at the bottom of a well. But the image, if it felt no refreshment, would have suffered no torture; whereas every vein of my body was a mouth of Dives praying for water. Oh, Father, how shall I tell you the grievous pains that I endured? Sometimes I so feared the sight of the mocking ripples overhead that I hid my eyes from their approach, lying face down on my bed till I knew that they were gone; yet on cloudy days, when they did not come, the heat was even worse to bear.

By day I hardly dared trust myself in the garden, for the nuns walked there, and one fiery noon they found me hanging so close above the tank that they snatched me away, crying out that I had tried to destroy myself. The scandal of this reaching the Abbess, she sent for me to know what demon had beset me; and when I wept and said, the longing to bathe my burning body, she broke into anger and cried out: "Do you not know that this is a sin well-nigh as grave as the other, and condemned by all the greatest saints? For a nun may

be tempted to take her life through excess of self-scrutiny and despair of her own worthiness; but this desire to indulge the despicable body is one of the lusts of the flesh, to be classed with concupiscence and adultery." And she ordered me to sleep every night for a month in my heavy gown, with a veil upon my face.

Now, Father, I believe it was this penance that drove me to sin. For we were in the dog-days, and it was more than flesh could bear. And on the third night, after the portress had passed, and the lights were out, I rose and flung off my veil and gown, and knelt in my window fainting. There was no moon, but the sky was full of stars. At first the garden was all blackness; but as I looked I saw a faint twinkle between the cypress-trunks, and I knew it was the starlight on the tank. The water! The water! It was there close to me—only a few bolts and bars were between us. . . .

The portress was a heavy sleeper, and I knew where she hung her keys. I stole thither, seized the keys and crept barefoot down the long corridor. The bolts of the cloister-door were stiff and heavy, and I dragged at them till my wrists were bursting. Then I turned the key and it cried out in the ward. I stood still, my whole body beating with fear lest the hinges too should have a voice—but no one stirred, and I pushed open the door and slipped out. The garden was as airless as a pit, but at least I could stretch my arms in it; and, oh, my Father, the sweetness of the stars! Sharp stones cut my feet as I ran, but I thought of the joy of bathing them in the tank, and that made the wounds sweet to me. . . . My Father, I have heard of the temptations which assailed the holy Solitaries of the desert, flattering the reluctant flesh beyond resistance; but none, I think, could have surpassed in ecstasy that first touch of the water on my limbs. To prolong the joy I let myself slip in slowly, resting my hands on the edge of the tank, and smiling to see my body, as I lowered it, break up the shining black surface and shatter the star-beams into splinters. And the water, my Father, seemed to crave me as I craved it. Its ripples rose about me, first in furtive touches, then in a long embrace

that clung and drew me down; till at length they lay like kisses on my lips. It was no frank comrade like the mountain pools of my childhood, but a secret playmate compassionating my pains and soothing them with noiseless hands. From the first I thought of it as an accomplice—its whisper seemed to promise me secrecy if I would promise it love. And I went back and back to it, my Father; all day I lived in the thought of it; each night I stole to it with fresh thirst. . . .

But at length the old portress died, and a young lay-sister took her place. She was a light sleeper, and keen-eared; and I knew the danger of venturing to her cell. I knew the danger, but when darkness came I felt the water drawing me. The first night I fought and held out; but the second I crept to her door. She made no motion when I entered, but rose up secretly and stole after me; and the next night she warned the Abbess, and the two came on me by the tank.

I was punished with terrible penances: fasting, scourging, imprisonment, and the privation of drinking water; for the Abbess stood amazed at the obduracy of my sin, and was resolved to make me an example. For a month I endured the pains of hell; then one night the Saracen pirates fell on our convent. On a sudden the darkness was full of flames and blood; but while the other nuns ran hither and thither, clinging to the Abbess or shrieking on the steps of the altar, I slipped through an unwatched postern and made my way up the hills. The next day the Emperor's soldiery descended on the carousing heathen, slew them and burned their vessels on the beach; the Abbess and nuns were rescued, the convent walls rebuilt, and peace was restored to the holy precincts. All this I heard from a shepherdess of the hills, who found me in my hiding, and brought me honeycomb and water. In her simplicity she offered to lead me home to the convent; but while she slept I laid off my wimple and scapular, and stealing her cloak fled away. And since then I have wandered alone over the face of the world, living in woods and desert places, often hungry, often cold and sometimes fearful; yet resigned to any hardship, and with a front for any peril, if only I may

sleep under the free heaven and wash the dust from my body in cool water.

V

The Hermit, as may be supposed, was much perturbed by this story, and dismayed that such sinfulness should cross his path. His first motion was to drive the woman forth, for he knew the heinousness of the craving for water, and how Saint Jerome, Saint Augustine and other holy doctors have taught that they who would purify the soul must not be distraught by the vain cares of bodily cleanliness; yet, remembering the desire that drew him to his lauds, he dared not judge his sister's fault too harshly.

Moreover he was moved by the Wild Woman's story of the hardships she had suffered, and the godless company she had been driven to keep—Egyptians, jugglers, outlaws and even sorcerers, who are masters of the pagan lore of the East, and still practice their rites among the simple folk of the hills. Yet she would not have him think wholly ill of this vagrant people, from whom she had often received food and comfort; and her worst danger, as he learned with shame, had come from the *girovaghi* or wandering monks, who are the scourge and shame of Christendom; carrying their ribald idleness from one monastery to another, and leaving on their way a trail of thieving, revelry and worse. Once or twice the Wild Woman had nearly fallen into their hands; but had been saved by her own quick wit and skill in woodcraft. Once, so she assured the Hermit, she had found refuge with a faun and his female, who fed and sheltered her in their cave, where she slept on a bed of leaves with their shaggy nurslings; and in this cave she had seen a stock or idol of wood, extremely seamed and ancient, before which the wood-creatures, when they thought she slept, laid garlands and the wild bees' honeycomb.

She told him also of a hill-village of weavers, where she lived many weeks, and learned to ply their trade in return for her lodging;

and where wayfaring men in the guise of cobblers, charcoal-burners or goatherds came at midnight and taught strange doctrines in the hovels. What they taught she could not clearly tell, save that they believed each soul could commune directly with its Maker, without need of priest or intercessor; and she had heard from some of their disciples that there are two Gods, one of good and one of evil, and that the God of evil has his throne in the Pope's palace in Rome. But in spite of these dark teachings they were a mild and merciful folk, full of loving-kindness toward poor persons and wayfarers; so that she grieved for them when one day a Dominican monk appeared with a company of soldiers, seizing some of the weavers and dragging them to prison, while others, with their wives and babes, fled to the winter woods. She fled with them, fearing to be charged with their heresy, and for months they lay hid in desert places, the older and weaker, when they fell sick from want and exposure, being devoutly ministered to by their brethren, and dying in the sure faith of heaven.

All this she related modestly and simply, not as one who joys in a godless life, but as having been drawn into it through misadventure; and she told the Hermit that when she heard the sound of church bells she never failed to say an Ave or a Pater; and that often, as she lay in the darkness of the forest, she had hushed her fears by reciting the versicles from the Evening Hour:

*Keep us, O Lord, as the apple of the eye,
Protect us under the shadow of Thy wings.*

The wound in her foot healed slowly; and the Hermit, while it was mending, repaired daily to her cave, reasoning with her in love and charity, and exhorting her to return to the cloister. But this she still refused to do; and fearing lest she attempt to fly before her foot was healed, and so expose herself to hunger and ill-usage, he promised not to betray her presence, or to take any measures toward restoring

her to her Order.

He began indeed to doubt whether she had any calling to the life enclosed; yet her innocence of mind made him feel that she might be won back to holy living if only her freedom were assured. So after many inward struggles (since his promise forbade his taking counsel with any concerning her) he resolved to let her stay in the cave till some light should come to him. And one day, visiting her about the hour of Nones (for it became his pious habit to say the evening office with her), he found her engaged with a little goatherd, who in a sudden seizure had fallen from a rock above her cave, and lay senseless and full of blood at her feet. And the Hermit saw with wonder how skilfully she bound up his cuts and restored his senses, giving him to drink of a liquor she had distilled from the simples of the mountain; whereat the boy opened his eyes and praised God, as one restored by heaven. Now it was known that this lad was subject to possessions, and had more than once dropped lifeless while he heeded his flock; and the Hermit, knowing that only great saints or unclean necromancers can loosen devils, feared that the Wild Woman had exorcised the spirits by means of unholy spells. But she told him that the goatherd's sickness was caused only by the heat of the sun, and that, such seizures being common in the hot countries whence she came, she had learned from a wise woman how to stay them by a decoction of the *carduus benedictus*, made in the third night of the waxing moon, but without the aid of magic.

"But," she continued, "you need not fear my bringing scandal on your holy retreat, for by the arts of the same wise woman my own wound is well-nigh healed, and tonight at sunset I set forth."

The Hermit's heart grew heavy as she spoke, and it seemed to him that her own look was sorrowful. And suddenly his perplexities were lifted from him, and he saw what was God's purpose with the Wild Woman.

"Why," said he, "do you fly from this place, where you are safe from molestation, and can look to the saving of your soul? Is it that

your feet weary for the road, and your spirits are heavy for lack of worldly discourse?"

She replied that she had no wish to travel, and felt no repugnance to solitude. "But," said she, "I must go forth to beg my bread, since in this wilderness there is none but yourself to feed me; and moreover, when it is known that I have healed the goatherd, curious folk and scandal-mongers may seek me out, and, learning whence I come, drag me back to the cloister."

Then the Hermit answered her and said: "In the early days, when the faith of Christ was first preached, there were holy women who fled to the desert and lived there in solitude, to the glory of God and the edification of their sex. If you are minded to embrace so austere a life, contenting you with such sustenance as the wilderness yields, and wearing out your days in prayer and vigil, it may be that you shall make amends for the great sin you have committed, and live and die in the peace of the Lord Jesus."

He spoke thus, knowing that if she left him and returned to her roaming, hunger and fear might drive her to fresh sin; whereas in a life of penance and reclusion her eyes might be opened to her iniquity.

He saw that his words moved her, and she seemed about to consent, and embrace a life of holiness; but suddenly she fell silent, and looked down on the valley at their feet.

"A stream flows in the glen below us," she said. "Do you forbid me to bathe in it in the heat of summer?"

"It is not I that forbid you, my daughter, but the laws of God," said the Hermit; "yet see how miraculously heaven protects you—for in the hot season, when your lust is upon you, our stream runs dry, and temptation will be removed from you. Moreover on these heights there is no excess of heat to madden the body, but always, before dawn and at the angelus, a cool breeze which refreshes it like water."

And after thinking long on this, and again receiving his promise not to betray her, the Wild Woman agreed to embrace a life of

reclusion; and the Hermit fell on his knees, worshipping God and rejoicing to think that, if he saved his sister from sin, his own term of probation would be shortened.

VI

Thereafter for two years the Hermit and the Wild Woman lived side by side, meeting together to pray on the great feast-days of the year, but on all other days dwelling apart, engaged in pious practices.

At first the Hermit, knowing the weakness of woman, and her little aptitude for the life apart, had feared that he might be disturbed by the nearness of his penitent; but she faithfully held to his commands, abstaining from all sight of him save on the Days of Obligation; and when they met, so modest and devout was her demeanour that she raised his soul to fresh fervency. And gradually it grew sweet to him to think that, near by though unseen, was one who performed the same tasks at the same hours; so that, whether he tended his garden, or recited his chaplet, or rose under the stars to repeat the midnight office, he had a companion in all his labours and devotions.

Meanwhile the report had spread abroad that a holy woman who cast out devils had made her dwelling in the Hermit's cliff; and many sick persons from the valley sought her out, and went away restored by her. These poor pilgrims brought her oil and flour, and with her own hands she made a garden like the Hermit's, and planted it with corn and lentils; but she would never take a trout from the brook, or receive the gift of a snared wild-fowl, for she said that in her vagrant life the wild creatures of the wood had befriended her, and as she had slept in peace among them, so now she would never suffer them to be molested.

In the third year came a plague, and death walked the cities, and many poor peasants fled to the hills to escape it. These the Hermit and his penitent faithfully tended, and so skilful were the Wild Woman's ministrations that the report of them reached the town

across the valley, and a deputation of burgesses came with rich offerings, and besought her to descend and comfort their sick. The Hermit, seeing her depart on so dangerous a mission, would have accompanied her, but she bade him remain and tend those who fled to the hills; and for many days his heart was consumed in prayer for her, and he feared lest every fugitive should bring him word of her death.

But at length she returned, wearied-out but whole, and covered with the blessings of the townsfolk; and thereafter her name for holiness spread as wide as the Hermit's.

Seeing how constant she remained in her chosen life, and what advance she had made in the way of perfection, the Hermit now felt that it behooved him to exhort her again to return to the convent; and more than once he resolved to speak with her, but his heart hung back. At length he bethought him that by failing in this duty he imperilled his own soul, and thereupon, on the next feast-day, when they met, he reminded her that in spite of her good works she still lived in sin and excommunicate, and that, now she had once more tasted the sweets of godliness, it was her duty to confess her fault and give herself up to her superiors.

She heard him meekly, but when he had spoken she was silent and her tears ran over; and looking at her he wept also, and said no more. And they prayed together, and returned each to his cave.

It was not till late winter that the plague abated; and the spring and early summer following were heavy with rains and great heat. When the Hermit visited his penitent at the feast of Pentecost, she appeared to him so weak and wasted that, when they had recited the *Veni, sancte spiritus*, and the proper psalms, he taxed her with too great rigour of penitential practices; but she replied that her weakness was not due to an excess of discipline, but that she had brought back from her labours among the sick a heaviness of body which the intemperance of the season no doubt increased. The evil rains continued, falling chiefly at night, while by day the land reeked

with heat and vapours; so that lassitude fell on the Hermit also, and he could hardly drag himself down to the spring whence he drew his drinking-water. Thus he fell into the habit of going down to the glen before cockcrow, after he had recited Matins; for at that hour the rain commonly ceased, and a faint air was stirring. Now because of the wet season the stream had not gone dry, and instead of replenishing his flagon slowly at the trickling spring, the Hermit went down to the waterside to fill it; and once, as he descended the steep slope of the glen, he heard the covert rustle, and saw the leaves stir as though something moved behind them. As the sound ceased the leaves grew still; but his heart was shaken, for it seemed to him that what he had seen in the dusk had a human semblance, such as the wood-people wear. And he was loath to think that such unhallowed beings haunted the glen.

A few days passed, and again, descending to the stream, he saw a figure flit through the covert; and this time a deeper fear entered into him; but he put away the thought, and prayed fervently for all souls in temptation. And when he spoke with the Wild Woman again, on the feast of the Seven Maccabees, which falls on the first day of August, he was smitten with fear to see her wasted looks, and besought her to cease from labouring and let him minister to her. But she denied him gently, and replied that all she asked of him was to keep her steadfastly in his prayers.

Before the feast of the Assumption the rains ceased, and the plague, which had begun to show itself, was stayed; but the ardency of the sun grew greater, and the Hermit's cliff was a fiery furnace. Never had such heat been known in those regions; but the people did not murmur, for with the cessation of the rain their crops were saved and the pestilence banished; and these mercies they ascribed in great part to the prayers and macerations of the two holy anchorets. Therefore on the eve of the Assumption they sent a messenger to the Hermit, saying that at daylight on the morrow the townspeople and all the dwellers in the valley would come forth, led by their Bishop,

who bore the Pope's blessing to the two Solitaries, and who was minded to celebrate the Mass of the Assumption in the Hermit's cave in the cliffside. At the word the Hermit was well-nigh distraught with joy, for he felt this to be a sign from heaven that his prayers were heard, and that he had won the Wild Woman's grace as well as his own. And all night he prayed that on the morrow she might confess her fault and receive the Sacrament with him.

Before dawn he recited the psalms of the proper nocturn; then he girded on his gown and sandals, and went forth to meet the Bishop.

As he went downward daylight stood on the mountains, and he thought he had never seen so fair a dawn. It filled the farthest heaven with brightness, and penetrated even to the woody crevices of the glen, as the grace of God had entered into the obscurest folds of his heart. The morning airs were hushed, and he heard only the sound of his own footfall, and the murmur of the stream which, though diminished, still poured a swift current between the rocks; but as he reached the bottom of the glen a sound of chanting came to him, and he knew that the pilgrims were at hand. His heart leapt up and his feet hastened forward; but at the stream's edge they were suddenly stayed, for in a pool where the water was still deep he saw the shining of a woman's body—and on the bank lay the Wild Woman's gown and sandals.

Fear and rage possessed the Hermit's heart, and he stood as one smitten dumb, covering his eyes from the shame. But the song of the approaching pilgrims swelled louder and nearer, and he cried angrily to the Wild Woman to come forth and hide herself from the people.

She made no answer, but in the dusk he saw her limbs sway with the swaying water, and her eyes were turned to him as if in mockery. At the sight fury filled him, and clambering over the rocks to the pool's edge he bent down and caught her by the shoulder. At that moment he could have strangled her with his hands, so abhorrent was the touch of her flesh; but as he cried out, heaping her with cruel names, he saw that her eyes returned his look without

wavering; and suddenly it came to him that she was dead. Then through all his anger and fear a great pang smote him; for here was his work undone, and one he had loved in Christ laid low in her sin, in spite of all his labours.

One moment pity possessed him; the next he thought how the people would find him bending above the body of a naked woman, whom he had held up to them as holy, but whom they might now well take for the secret instrument of his undoing; and seeing how at her touch all the slow edifice of his holiness was demolished, and his soul in mortal jeopardy, he felt the earth reel round him and his eyes grew blind.

Already the head of the procession had appeared, and the glen shook with the great sound of the *Salve Regina*. When the Hermit opened his eyes once more the air shone with thronged candle-flames, which glittered on the gold of priestly vestments, and on the blazing monstrance beneath its canopy; and close above him he saw the Bishop's face.

The Hermit struggled to his knees.

"My Father in God," he cried, "behold, for my sins I have been visited by a demon—" But as he spoke he perceived that those about him no longer listened, and that the Bishop and all his clergy had fallen on their knees beside the pool. Then the Hermit, following their gaze, saw that the brown waters of the pool covered the Wild Woman's limbs as with a garment, and that about her floating head a brightness floated; and to the utmost edges of the throng a cry of praise went up, for many were there whom the Wild Woman had healed, and who read God's mercy in this wonder. But fresh fear fell on the Hermit, for he had cursed a dying saint, and denounced her aloud to all the people; and this new anguish, coming so close on the other, smote down his enfeebled frame, so that his limbs failed him and again he sank to the ground.

The earth reeled, and the bending faces grew dim about him; but as he forced his weak voice once more to proclaim his sins he felt the

touch of absolution, and the holy oils of the last voyage on his lips and eyes. Peace returned to him then, and with it the longing to look once more upon his lauds, as he had dreamed of doing at his death; but he was too far gone to make this longing known, and so tried to put it from his mind. Yet in his weakness it held him, and the tears ran down his face.

Then, as he lay there, feeling the earth slip from him, and the everlasting arms replace it, he heard a peal of voices that seemed to come down from the sky and mingle with the singing of the throng; and the words of the chant were the words of his own lauds, so long hidden in the secret of his breast, and now rejoicing above him through the spheres. And his soul rose on the chant, and soared with it to the seat of mercy.

The Last Asset

“**T**HE DEVIL!” Paul Garnett exclaimed as he re-read his note; and the dry old gentleman who was at the moment his only neighbour in the modest restaurant they both frequented, remarked with a smile: “You don’t seem particularly disturbed at meeting him.”

Garnett returned the smile. “I don’t know why I apostrophised him, for he’s not in the least present—except inasmuch as he may prove to be at the bottom of anything unexpected.”

The old gentleman who, like Garnett, was an American, and spoke in the thin rarefied voice which seems best fitted to emit sententious truths, twisted his lean neck round to cackle out: “Ah, it’s generally a woman who’s at the bottom of the unexpected. Not,” he added, leaning forward with deliberation to select a tooth-pick, “that that precludes the devil’s being there too.”

Garnett uttered the requisite laugh, and his neighbour, pushing back his plate, called out with a perfectly unbending American intonation: “Gassong! L’addition, silver play.”

His repast, as usual, had been a simple one, and he left only thirty centimes in the plate on which his account was presented; but the waiter, to whom he was evidently a familiar presence, received the tribute with Latin amenity, and hovered helpfully about the table while the old gentleman cut and lighted his cigar.

“Yes,” the latter proceeded, revolving the cigar meditatively between his thin lips, “they’re generally both in the same hole, like the owl and the prairie-dog in the natural history books of my youth. I believe it was all a mistake about the owl and the prairie-dog, but it

isn't about the unexpected. The fact is, the unexpected *is* the devil—the sooner you find that out, the happier you'll be." He leaned back, tilting his bald head against the blotched mirror behind him, and rambling on with gentle garrulity while Garnett attacked his omelet.

"Get your life down to routine—eliminate surprises. Arrange things so that, when you get up in the morning, you'll know exactly what's going to happen to you during the day—and the next day and the next. I don't say it's funny—it ain't. But it's better than being hit on the head by a brickbat. That's why I always take my meals at this restaurant. I know just how much onion they put in things—if I went to the next place I shouldn't. And I always take the same streets to come here—I've been doing it for ten years now. I know at which crossing to look out—I know what I'm going to see in the shop-windows. It saves a lot of wear and tear to know what's coming. For a good many years I never *did* know, from one minute to another, and now I like to think that everything's cut-and-dried, and nothing unexpected can jump out at me like a tramp from a ditch."

He paused calmly to knock the ashes from his cigar and Garnett said with a smile: "Doesn't such a plan of life cut off nearly all the possibilities?"

The old gentleman made a contemptuous motion. "Possibilities of what? Of being multifariously miserable? There are lots of ways of being miserable, but there's only one way of being comfortable, and that is to stop running round after happiness. If you make up your mind not to be happy there's no reason why you shouldn't have a fairly good time."

"That was Schopenhauer's idea, I believe," the young man said, pouring his wine with the smile of youthful incredulity.

"I guess he hadn't the monopoly," responded his friend. "Lots of people have found out the secret—the trouble is that so few live up to it."

He rose from his seat, pushing the table forward, and standing passive while the waiter advanced with his shabby overcoat and

umbrella. Then he nodded to Garnett, lifted his hat to the broad-bosomed lady behind the desk, and passed out into the street.

Garnett looked after him with a musing smile. The two had exchanged views on life for two years without so much as knowing each other's names. Garnett was a newspaper correspondent whose work kept him mainly in London, but on his periodic visits to Paris he lodged in a dingy hotel of the Latin quarter, the chief merit of which was its nearness to the cheap and excellent restaurant where the two Americans had made acquaintance. But Garnett's assiduity in frequenting the place arose, in the end, less from the excellence of the food than from the enjoyment of his old friend's conversation. Amid the flashy sophistications of the Parisian life to which Garnett's trade introduced him, the American sage's conversation had the crisp and homely flavour of a native dish—one of the domestic compounds for which the exiled palate is supposed to yearn. It was a mark of the old man's impersonality that, in spite of the interest he inspired, Garnett had never got beyond idly wondering who he might be, where he lived, and what his occupations were. He was presumably a bachelor—a man of family ties, however relaxed, though he might have been as often absent from home would not have been as regularly present in the same place—and there was about him a boundless desultoriness which renewed Garnett's conviction that there is no one on earth as idle as an American who is not busy. From certain allusions it was plain that he had lived many years in Paris, yet he had not taken the trouble to adapt his tongue to the local inflections, but spoke French with the accent of one who has formed his notion of the language from a phrase-book.

The city itself seemed to have made as little impression on him as its speech. He appeared to have no artistic or intellectual curiosities, to remain untouched by the complex appeal of Paris, while preserving, perhaps the more strikingly from his very detachment, that odd American astuteness which seems the fruit of innocence rather than of experience. His nationality revealed itself again in a

mild interest in the political problems of his adopted country, though they appeared to preoccupy him only as illustrating the boundless perversity of mankind. The exhibition of human folly never ceased to divert him, and though his examples of it seemed mainly drawn from the columns of one exiguous daily paper, he found there matter for endless variations on his favourite theme. If this monotony of topic did not weary the younger man, it was because he fancied he could detect under it the tragic note of the fixed idea—of some great moral upheaval which had flung his friend stripped and starving on the desert island of the little restaurant where they met. He hardly knew wherein he read this revelation—whether in the shabbiness of the sage's dress, the impersonal courtesy of his manner, or the shade of apprehension which lurked, indescribably, in his guileless yet suspicious eye. There were moments when Garnett could only define him by saying that he looked like a man who had seen a ghost.

II

An apparition almost as startling had come to Garnett himself in the shape of the mauve note handed to him by his *concierge* as he was leaving the hotel for luncheon.

Not that, on the face of it, a missive announcing Mrs. Sam Newell's arrival at Ritz's, and her need of his presence there that day at five, carried any mark of the portentous. It was not her being at Ritz's that surprised him. The fact that she was chronically hard up, and had once or twice lately been so harshly confronted with the consequences as to accept—indeed solicit—a loan of five pounds from him: this circumstance, as Garnett knew, would never be allowed to affect the general tenor of her existence. If one came to Paris, where could one go but to Ritz's? Did he see her in some grubby hole across the river? Or in a family *pension* near the Place de l'Etoile? There was no affectation in her tendency to gravitate toward what was costliest and most conspicuous. In doing so she obeyed one of the profoundest instincts of her nature, and it was another instinct

which taught her to gratify the first at any cost, even to that of dipping into the pocket of an impecunious journalist. It was a part of her strength—and of her charm, too—that she did such things naturally, openly, without any of the grimaces of dissimulation or compunction.

Her recourse to Garnett had of course marked a specially low ebb in her fortunes. Save in moments of exceptional dearth she had richer sources of supply; and he was nearly sure that by running over the “society column” of the *Paris Herald* he should find an explanation, not perhaps of her presence at Ritz’s, but of her means of subsistence there. What perplexed him was not the financial but the social aspect of the case. When Mrs. Newell had left London in July she had told him that, between Cowes and Scotland, she and Hermie were provided for till the middle of October: after that, as she put it, they would have to look about. Why, then, when she had in her hand the opportunity of living for three months at the expense of the British aristocracy, did she rush off to Paris at heaven knew whose expense in the beginning of September? She was not a woman to act incoherently; if she made mistakes they were not of that kind. Garnett felt sure she would never willingly relax her hold on her distinguished friends—was it possible that it was they who had somewhat violently let go of her?

As Garnett reviewed the situation he began to see that this possibility had for some time been latent in it. He had felt that something might happen at any moment—and was not this the something he had obscurely foreseen? Mrs. Newell really moved too fast: her position was as perilous as that of an invading army without a base of supplies. She used up everything too quickly—friends, credit, influence, forbearance. It was so easy for her to acquire all these—what a pity she had never learned to keep them! He himself, for instance—the most insignificant of her acquisitions—was beginning to feel like a squeezed sponge at the mere thought of her; and it was this sense of exhaustion, of the inability to provide more,

either materially or morally, which had provoked his exclamation on opening her note. From the first days of their acquaintance her prodigality had amazed him, but he had believed it to be surpassed by the infinity of her resources. If she exhausted old supplies she always had new ones to replace them. When one set of people began to find her impossible, another was always beginning to find her indispensable. Yes—but there were limits—there were only so many sets of people, at least in her classification, and when she came to an end of them, what then? Was this flight to Paris a sign that she had come to an end—was she going to try Paris because London had failed her? The time of year precluded such a conjecture. Mrs. Newell's Paris was non-existent in September. The town was a desert of gaping trippers—he could as soon think of her seeking social restoration at Margate.

For a moment it occurred to him that she might have come over to renew her wardrobe; but he knew her dates too well to dwell long on this. It was in April and December that she visited the dress-makers: before December, he had heard her explain, one got nothing but “the American fashions.” Mrs. Newell's scorn of all things American was somewhat illogically coupled with the determination to use her own Americanism to the utmost as a means of social advance. She had found out long ago that, on certain lines, it paid in London to be American, and she had manufactured for herself a personality independent of geographical or social demarcations, and presenting that remarkable blend of plantation dialect, Bowery slang and hyperbolic statement, which expresses the British idea of an unadulterated Americanism. Mrs. Newell, for all her talents, was not by nature either humorous or hyperbolic, and there were times when it would doubtless have been a relief to her to be as stolid as some of the persons whose dulness it was her fate to enliven. It was perhaps the need of relaxing which had drawn her into her odd intimacy with Garnett, with whom she did not have to be either scrupulously English or artificially American, since the impression she made on

him was of no more consequence than that which she produced on her footman. Garnett was aware that he owed his success to his insignificance, but the fact affected him only as adding one more element to his knowledge of Mrs. Newell's character. He was as ready to sacrifice his personal vanity in such a cause as he had been, at the outset of their acquaintance, to sacrifice his professional pride to the opportunity of knowing her.

When he had accepted the position of "London correspondent" (with an occasional side-glance at Paris) to the New York *Searchlight*, he had not understood that his work was to include the obligation of "interviewing"; indeed, had the possibility presented itself in advance, he would have met it by packing his valise and returning to the drudgery of his assistant-editorship in New York. But when, after three months in Europe, he received a letter from his chief, suggesting that he should enliven the Sunday *Searchlight* by a series of "Talks with Smart Americans in London" (beginning say, with Mrs. Sam Newell), the change of focus already enabled him to view the proposal without passion. For his life on the edge of the great world-caldron of art, politics and pleasure—of that high-spiced brew which is nowhere else so subtly and variously compounded—had bred in him an eagerness to taste of the heady mixture. He knew he should never have the full spoon at his lips, but he recalled the peasant-girl in one of Browning's plays, who boasts of having eaten polenta cut with a knife which has carved an ortolan. Might not Mrs. Newell, who had so successfully cut a way into the dense and succulent mass of English society, serve as the knife to season his polenta?

He had expected, as the result of the interview, to which she promptly, almost eagerly, agreed, no more than the glimpse of brightly lit vistas which a waiting messenger may catch through open doors; but instead he had found himself drawn at once into the inner sanctuary, not of London society, but of Mrs. Newell's relation to it. She had been candidly charmed by the idea of the interview: it

struck him that she was conscious of the need of being freshened up. Her appearance was brilliantly fresh, with the inveterate freshness of the toilet-table; her paint was as impenetrable as armour. But her personality was a little tarnished: she was in want of social renovation. She had been doing and saying the same things for too long a time. London, Cowes, Homburg, Scotland, Monte Carlo—that had been the round since Hermy was a baby. Hermy was her daughter, Miss Hermione Newell, who was called in presently to be shown off to the interviewer and add a paragraph to the celebration of her mother's charms.

Miss Newell's appearance was so full of an unassisted freshness that for a moment Garnett made the mistake of fancying that she could fill a paragraph of her own. But he soon found that her vague personality was merely tributary to her parent's; that her youth and grace were, in some mysterious way, her mother's rather than her own. She smiled obediently on Garnett, but could contribute little beyond her smile, and the general sweetness of her presence, to the picture of Mrs. Newell's existence that it was the young man's business to draw. And presently he found that she had left the room without his noticing it.

He learned in time that this unnoticeableness was the most conspicuous thing about her. Burning at best with a mild light, she became invisible in the glare of her mother's personality. It was in fact only as a product of her environment that poor Hermione struck the imagination. With the smartest woman in London as her guide and example she had never developed a taste for dress, and with opportunities for enlightenment from which Garnett's fancy recoiled she remained simple, unsuspecting and tender, with an inclination to good works and afternoon church, a taste for the society of dull girls, and a clinging fidelity to old governesses and retired nurse-maids. Mrs. Newell, whose boast it was that she looked facts in the face, frankly owned that she had not been able to make anything of Hermione. "If she has a rôle I haven't discovered it," she confessed to

Garnett. "I've tried everything, but she doesn't fit in anywhere."

Mrs. Newell spoke as if her daughter were a piece of furniture acquired without due reflection, and for which no suitable place could be found. She got, of course, what she could out of Hermione, who wrote her notes, ran her errands, saw tiresome people for her, and occupied an intermediate office between that of lady's maid and secretary; but such small returns on her investment were not what Mrs. Newell had counted on. What was the use of producing and educating a handsome daughter if she did not, in some more positive way, contribute to her parent's advancement?

III

"It's about Hermy," Mrs. Newell said, rising from the heap of embroidered cushions which formed the background of her afternoon repose.

Her sitting-room at Ritz's was full of warmth and fragrance. Long-stemmed roses filled the vases on the chimney-piece, in which a fire sparkled with that effect of luxury which fires produce when the weather is not cold enough to justify them. On the writing-table, among notes and cards, and signed photographs of celebrities, Mrs. Newell's gold inkstand, her jewelled pen-holder, her heavily monogrammed despatch-box, gave back from their expensive surfaces the glint of the flame, which sought out and magnified the orient of the pearls among the lady's laces and found a mirror in the pinky polish of her fingertips. It was just such a scene as a little September fire, lit for show and not for warmth, would delight to dwell on and pick out in all its opulent details; and even Garnett, inured to Mrs. Newell's capacity for extracting manna from the desert, reflected that she must have found new fields to glean.

"It's about Hermy," she repeated, making room for him at her side. "I had to see you at once. We came over yesterday from London."

Garnett, seating himself, continued his leisurely survey of the room. In the blaze of Mrs. Newell's refulgence Hermione, as usual,

faded out of sight, and he hardly noticed her mother's allusion.

"I've never seen you more resplendent," he remarked.

She received the tribute with complacency. "The rooms are not bad, are they? We came over with the Woolsey Hubbards (you've heard of them, of course?—they're from Detroit), and really they do things very decently. Their motor met us at Boulogne, and the courier always wires ahead to have the rooms filled with flowers. This *salon* is really a part of their suite. I simply couldn't have afforded it myself."

She delivered these facts in a high decisive voice, which had a note like the clink of her many bracelets and the rattle of her ringed hands against the enamelled cigarette-case that she held out to Garnett after helping herself from its contents.

"You are always meeting such charming people," said the young man with mild irony; and, reverting to her first remark, he bethought himself to add: "I hope Miss Hermione is not ill?"

"Ill? She was never ill in her life," exclaimed Mrs. Newell, as though her daughter had been accused of an indelicacy.

"It was only that you said you had come over on her account."

"So I have. Hermione is to be married."

Mrs. Newell brought out the words impressively, drawing back to observe their effect on her visitor. It was such that he received them with a long silent stare, which finally passed into a cry of wonder. "Married? For heaven's sake, to whom?"

Mrs. Newell continued to regard him with a smile so serene and victorious that he saw she took his somewhat unseemly astonishment as a merited tribute to her genius. Presently she extended a glittering hand and took a sheet of note-paper from the blotter.

"You can have that put in to-morrow's *Herald*," she said.

Garnett, receiving the paper, read in Hermione's own finished hand: "A marriage has been arranged, and will shortly take place, between the Comte Louis du Trayas, son of the Marquis du Trayas de la Baume, and Miss Hermione Newell, daughter of Samuel C. Newell

Esqre., of Elmira, N. Y. Comte Louis du Trayas belongs to one of the oldest and most distinguished families in France, and is equally well connected in England, being the nephew of Lord Saint Priscoe and a cousin of the Countess of Morningfield, whom he frequently visits at Adham and Portlow.”

The perusal of this document filled Garnett with such deepening wonder that he could not, for the moment, even do justice to the strangeness of its being written out for publication in the bride’s own hand. Hermione a bride! Hermione a future countess! Hermione on the brink of a marriage which would give her not only a great “situation” in the Parisian world but a footing in some of the best houses in England! Regardless of its unflattering implications, Garnett prolonged his stare of amazement till Mrs. Newell somewhat sharply exclaimed—“Well, didn’t I always tell you she’d marry a Frenchman?”

Garnett, in spite of himself, smiled at this revised version of his hostess’s frequent assertion that Hermione was too goody-goody to take in England, but that with her little dowdy air she might very well “go off” in the Faubourg if only a *dot* could be raked up—and the recollection flashed a new light on the versatility of Mrs. Newell’s genius.

“But how did you do it—?” was on the tip of his tongue; and he had barely time to give the query the more conventional turn of: “How did it happen?”

“Oh, we were up at Glaish with the Edmund Fitzarthurs. Lady Edmund is a sort of cousin of the Morningfields’, who have a shooting-lodge near Glaish—a place called Portlow—and young Trayas was there with them. Lady Edmund, who is a dear, drove Hermy over to Portlow, and the thing was done in no time. He simply fell over head and ears in love with her. You know Hermy is really very handsome in her peculiar way. I don’t think you’ve ever appreciated her,” Mrs. Newell summed up with a note of reproach.

“I’ve appreciated her, I assure you; but one somehow didn’t think

of her marrying—so soon.”

“Soon? She’s three and twenty; but you’ve no imagination,” said Mrs. Newell; and Garnett inwardly admitted that he had not enough to soar to the heights of her invention. For the marriage, of course, was her invention, a superlative stroke of business in which he was sure the principal parties had all been passive agents, in which every one, from the bankrupt and disreputable Fitzarthurs to the rich and immaculate Morningfields, had by some mysterious sleight of hand been made to fit into Mrs. Newell’s designs. But it was not enough for Garnett to marvel at her work—he wanted to understand it, to take it apart, to find out how the trick had been done. It was true that Mrs. Newell had always said Hermy might go off in the Faubourg if she had a *dot*—but even Mrs. Newell’s juggling could hardly conjure up a *dot*: such feats as she was able to perform in this line were usually made to serve her own urgent necessities. And besides, who was likely to take sufficient interest in Hermione to supply her with the means of marrying a French nobleman? The flowers ordered in advance by the Woolsey Hubbards’ courier made Garnett wonder if that accomplished functionary had also wired over to have Miss Newell’s settlements drawn up. But of all the comments hovering on his lips the only one he could decently formulate was the remark that he supposed Mrs. Newell and her daughter had come over to see the young man’s family and make the final arrangements.

“Oh, they’re made—everything’s settled,” said Mrs. Newell, looking him squarely in the eye. “You’re wondering, of course, about the *dot*—Frenchmen never go off their heads to the extent of forgetting *that*; or at least their parents don’t allow them to.”

Garnett murmured a vague assent, and she went on without the least appearance of resenting his curiosity: “It all came about so fortunately. Only fancy, just the week they met I got a little legacy from an aunt in Elmira—a good soul I hadn’t seen or heard of for years. I suppose I ought to have put on mourning for her, by the way, but it would have eaten up a good bit of the legacy, and I really

needed it all for poor Hermý. Oh, it's not a fortune, you understand—but the young man is madly in love, and has always had his own way, so after a lot of correspondence it's been arranged. They saw Hermý this morning, and they're enchanted."

"And the marriage takes place very soon?"

"Yes, in a few weeks, here. His mother is an invalid and couldn't have gone to England. Besides, the French don't travel. And as Hermý has become a Catholic—"

"Already?"

Mrs. Newell stared. "It doesn't take long. And it suits Hermý exactly—she can go to church so much oftener. So I thought," Mrs. Newell concluded with dignity, "that a wedding at Saint Philippe du Roule would be the most suitable thing at this season."

"Dear me," said Garnett, "I am left breathless—I can't catch up with you. I suppose even the day is fixed, though Miss Hermione doesn't mention it," and he indicated the official announcement in his hand.

Mrs. Newell laughed. "Hermý had to write that herself, poor dear, because my scrawl's too hideous—but I dictated it. No, the day's not fixed—that's why I sent for you." There was a splendid directness about Mrs. Newell. It would never have occurred to her to pretend to Garnett that she had summoned him for the pleasure of his company.

"You've sent for me—to fix the day?" he enquired humorously.

"To remove the last obstacle to its being fixed."

"I? What kind of an obstacle could I have the least effect on?" Mrs. Newell met his banter with a look which quelled it. "I want you to find her father."

"Her father? Miss Hermione's—?"

"My husband, of course. I suppose you know he's living."

Garnett blushed at his own clumsiness. "I—yes—that is, I really knew nothing—" he stammered, feeling that each word added to it. If Hermione was unnoticeable, Mr. Newell had always been invisible. The young man had never so much as given him a thought, and it

was awkward to come on him so suddenly at a turn of the talk.

"Well, he is—living here in Paris," said Mrs. Newell, with a note of asperity which seemed to imply that her friend might have taken the trouble to post himself on this point.

"In Paris? But in that case isn't it quite simple—?"

"To find him? I dare say it won't be difficult, though he's rather mysterious. But the point is that I can't go to him—and that if I write to him he won't answer."

"Ah," said Garnett thoughtfully.

"And so you've got to find him for me, and tell him."

"Tell him what?"

"That he must come to the wedding—that we must show ourselves together at church and afterward in the sacristy."

She delivered the behest in her sharp imperative key, the tone of the born commander. But for once Garnett ventured to question her orders.

"And supposing he won't come?"

"He must if he cares for his daughter's happiness. She can't be married without him."

"Can't be married?"

"The French are like that—especially the old families. I was given to understand at once that my husband must appear—if only to establish the fact that we're not divorced."

"Ah—you're *not*, then?" escaped from Garnett.

"Mercy no! Divorce is stupid. They don't like it in Europe. And in this case it would have been the end of Hermy's marriage. They wouldn't think of letting their son marry the child of divorced parents."

"How fortunate, then—"

"Yes; but I always think of such things beforehand. And of course I've told them that my husband will be present."

"You think he will consent?"

"No; not at first; but you must make him. You must tell him how

sweet Hermione is—and you must see Louis, and be able to describe their happiness. You must dine here to-night—he’s coming. We’re all dining with the Hubbards, and they expect you. They’ve given Hermy some very good diamonds—though I should have preferred a cheque, as she’ll be horribly poor. But I think Kate Hubbard means to do something about the trousseau—Hermy is at Paquin’s with her now. You’ve no idea how delightful all our friends have been.—Ah, here is one of them now,” she broke off smiling, as the door opened to admit, without preliminary announcement, a gentleman so glossy and ancient, with such a fixed unnatural freshness of smile and eye, that he gave Garnett the effect of having been embalmed and then enamelled. It needed not the exotic-looking ribbon in the visitor’s button-hole, nor Mrs. Newell’s introduction of him as her friend Baron Schenkelderff, to assure Garnett of his connection with a race as ancient as his appearance.

Baron Schenkelderff greeted his hostess with paternal playfulness, and the young man with an ease which might have been acquired on the Stock Exchange and in the dressing-rooms of “leading ladies.” He spoke a faultless colourless English, from which one felt he might pass with equal mastery to half a dozen other languages. He inquired patronisingly for the excellent Hubbards, asked his hostess if she did not mean to give him a drop of tea and a cigarette, remarked that he need not ask if Hermione was still closeted with the dress-maker, and, on the waiter’s coming in answer to his ring, ordered the tea himself, and added a request for *fine champagne*. It was not the first time that Garnett had seen such minor liberties taken in Mrs. Newell’s drawing-room, but they had hitherto been taken by persons who had at least the superiority of knowing what they were permitting themselves, whereas the young man felt almost sure that Baron Schenkelderff’s manner was the most distinguished he could achieve; and this deepened the disgust with which, as the minutes passed, he yielded to the conviction that the Baron was Mrs. Newell’s aunt.

Garnett had always foreseen that Mrs. Newell might some day ask him to do something he should greatly dislike. He had never gone so far as to conjecture what it might be, but had simply felt that if he allowed his acquaintance with her to pass from spectatorship to participation he must be prepared to find himself, at any moment, in a queer situation.

The moment had come; and he was relieved to find that he could meet it by refusing her request. He had not always been sure that she would leave him this alternative. She had a way of involving people in her complications without their being aware of it; and Garnett had pictured himself in holes so tight that there might not be room for a wriggle. Happily in this case he could still move freely. Nothing compelled him to act as an intermediary between Mrs. Newell and her husband, and it was preposterous to suppose that, even in a life of such perpetual upheaval as hers, there were no roots which struck deeper than her casual intimacy with himself. She had simply laid hands on him because he happened to be within reach, and he would put himself out of reach by leaving for London on the morrow.

Having thus inwardly asserted his independence, he felt free to let his fancy dwell on the strangeness of the situation. He had always supposed that Mrs. Newell, in her flight through life, must have thrown a good many victims to the wolves, and had assumed that Mr. Newell had been among the number. That he had been dropped overboard at an early stage in the lady's career seemed probable from the fact that neither his wife nor his daughter ever mentioned him. Mrs. Newell was incapable of reticence, and if her husband had still been an active element in her life he would certainly have figured in her conversation. Garnett, if he thought of the matter at all, had concluded that divorce must long since have eliminated Mr. Newell; but he now saw how he had underrated his friend's faculty for using up the waste material of life. She had always struck him as the most extravagant of women, yet it turned out that by a miracle of

thrift she had for years kept a superfluous husband on the chance that he might some day be useful. The day had come, and Mr. Newell was to be called from his obscurity. Garnett wondered what had become of him in the interval, and in what shape he would respond to the evocation. The fact that his wife feared he might not respond to it at all seemed to show that his exile was voluntary, or had at least come to appear preferable to other alternatives; but if that were the case it was curious he should not have taken legal means to free himself. He could hardly have had his wife's motives for wishing to maintain the vague tie between them; but conjecture lost itself in trying to picture what his point of view was likely to be, and Garnett, on his way to the Hubbards' dinner that evening, could not help regretting that circumstances denied him the opportunity of meeting so enigmatic a person. The young man's knowledge of Mrs. Newell's methods made him feel that her husband might be an interesting study. This, however, did not affect his resolve to keep clear of the business. He entered the Hubbards' dining-room with the firm intention of refusing to execute Mrs. Newell's commission, and if he changed his mind in the course of the evening it was not owing to that lady's persuasions.

Garnett's curiosity as to the Hubbards' share in Hermione's marriage was appeased before he had been five minutes at their table.

Mrs. Woolsey Hubbard was an expansive blonde, whose ample but disciplined outline seemed the result of a well-matched struggle between her cook and her corsetmaker. She talked a great deal of what was appropriate in dress and conduct, and seemed to regard Mrs. Newell as a final arbiter on both points. To do or to wear anything inappropriate would have been extremely mortifying to Mrs. Hubbard, and she was evidently resolved, at the price of eternal vigilance, to prove her familiarity with what she frequently referred to as "the right thing." Mr. Hubbard appeared to have no such preoccupations. Garnett, if called on to describe him, would have

done so by saying that he was the American who always pays. The young man, in the course of his foreign wanderings, had come across many fellow-citizens of Mr. Hubbard's type in the most diverse company and surroundings; and wherever they were to be found, they always had their hands in their pockets. Mr. Hubbard's standard of gentility was the extent of a man's capacity to "foot the bill"; and as no one but an occasional compatriot cared to dispute the privilege with him he seldom had reason to doubt his social superiority.

Garnett, nevertheless, did not believe that this lavish pair were, as Mrs. Newell would have phrased it, "putting up" Hermione's *dot*. They would go very far in diamonds but they would hang back from securities. Their readiness to pay was indefinitely mingled with a dread of being expected to, and their prodigalities would take flight at the first hint of coercion. Mrs. Newell, who had had a good deal of experience in managing this type of millionaire, could be trusted not to arouse their susceptibilities, and Garnett was therefore certain that the chimerical legacy had been extracted from other pockets. There were none in view but those of Baron Schenkelderff, who, seated at Mrs. Hubbard's right, with a new order in his buttonhole, and a fresh glaze upon his features, enchanted that lady by his careless references to crowned heads and his condescending approval of the champagne. Garnett was more than ever certain that it was the Baron who was paying; and it was this conviction which made him suddenly resolve that, at any cost, Hermione's marriage must take place. He had felt no special interest in the marriage except as one more proof of Mrs. Newell's extraordinary capacity; but now it appealed to him from the girl's own stand-point. For he saw, with a touch of compunction, that in the mephitic air of her surroundings a love-story of miraculous freshness had flowered. He had only to intercept the glances which the young couple exchanged to find himself transported to the candid region of romance. It was evident that Hermione adored and was adored; that the lovers believed in each other and in every one about them, and that even the legacy of

the defunct aunt had not been too great a strain on their faith in human nature.

His first glance at the Comte Louis du Trayas showed Garnett that, by some marvel of fitness, Hermione had happened on a kindred nature. If the young man's long mild features and short-sighted glance revealed no special force of character, they showed a benevolence and simplicity as incorruptible as her own, and declared that their possessor, whatever his failings, would never imperil the illusions she had so wondrously preserved. The fact that the girl took her good fortune naturally, and did not regard herself as suddenly snatched from the jaws of death, added poignancy to the situation; for if she missed this way of escape, and was thrown back on her former life, the day of discovery could not be long deferred. It made Garnett shiver to think of her growing old between her mother and Schenkelderff, or such successors of the Baron's as might probably attend on Mrs. Newell's waning fortunes; for it was clear to him that the Baron marked the first stage in his friend's decline. When Garnett took leave that evening he had promised Mrs. Newell that he would try to find her husband.

V

If Mr. Newell read in the papers the announcement of his daughter's marriage it did not cause him to lift the veil of seclusion in which his wife represented him as shrouded.

A round of the American banks in Paris failed to give Garnett his address, and it was only in chance talk with one of the young secretaries of the Embassy that he was put on Mr. Newell's track. The secretary's father, it appeared, had known the Newells some twenty years earlier. He had had business relations with Mr. Newell, who was then a man of property, with factories or something of the kind, the narrator thought, somewhere in Western New York. There had been at this period, for Mrs. Newell, a phase of large hospitality and showy carriages in Washington and at Narragansett. Then her

husband had had reverses, had lost heavily in Wall Street, and had finally drifted abroad and disappeared from sight. The young man did not know at what point in his financial decline Mr. Newell had parted company with his wife and daughter; "though you may bet your hat," he philosophically concluded, "that the old girl hung on as long as there were any pickings." He did not himself know Mr. Newell's address, but opined that it might be extracted from a certain official of the Consulate, if Garnett could give a sufficiently good reason for the request; and here in fact Mrs. Newell's emissary learned that her husband was to be found in an obscure street of the Luxembourg quarter.

In order to be near the scene of action, Garnett went to breakfast at his usual haunt, determined to despatch his business as early in the day as politeness allowed. The head waiter welcomed him to a table near that of the transatlantic sage, who sat in his customary corner, his head tilted back against the blistered mirror at an angle suggesting that in a freer civilisation his feet would have sought the same level. He greeted Garnett affably and the two exchanged their usual generalisations on life till the sage rose to go; whereupon it occurred to Garnett to accompany him. His friend took the offer in good part, merely remarking that he was going to the Luxembourg gardens, where it was his invariable habit, on good days, to feed the sparrows with the remains of his breakfast roll; and Garnett replied that, as it happened, his own business lay in the same direction.

"Perhaps, by the way," he added, "you can tell me how to find the rue Panonceaux, where I must go presently. I thought I knew this quarter fairly well, but I have never heard of it."

His companion came to a halt on the narrow pavement, to the confusion of the dense and desultory traffic which flows through the old streets of the Latin quarter. He fixed his mild eye on Garnett and gave a twist to the cigar which lingered in the corner of his mouth.

"The rue Panonceaux? It is an out-of-the-way hole, but I can tell you how to find it," he answered.

He made no motion to do so, however, but continued to bend on the young man the full force of his interrogative gaze; then he added: "Would you mind telling me your object in going there?"

Garnett looked at him with surprise: a question so unblushingly personal was strangely out of keeping with his friend's usual attitude of detachment. Before he could reply, however, the other had continued: "Do you happen to be in search of Samuel C. Newell?"

"Why, yes, I am," said Garnett with a start of conjecture.

His companion uttered a sigh. "I supposed so," he said resignedly; "and in that case," he added, "we may as well have the matter out in the Luxembourg."

Garnett had halted before him with deepening astonishment. "But you don't mean to tell me—?" he stammered.

The little man made a motion of assent. "I am Samuel C. Newell," he said; "and if you have no objection, I prefer not to break through my habit of feeding the sparrows. We are five minutes late as it is."

He quickened his pace without awaiting a reply from Garnett, who walked beside him in unsubdued wonder till they reached the Luxembourg gardens, where Mr. Newell, making for one of the less frequented alleys, seated himself on a bench and drew the fragment of a roll from his pocket. His coming was evidently expected, for a shower of little dusky bodies at once descended on him, and the gravel fluttered with battling beaks and wings as he distributed his dole.

It was not till the ground was white with crumbs, and the first frenzy of his pensioners appeased, that he turned to Garnett and said: "I presume, sir, that you come from my wife."

Garnett coloured with embarrassment: the more simply the old man took his mission the more complicated it appeared to himself.

"From your wife—and from Miss Newell," he said at length. "You have perhaps heard that your daughter is to be married."

"Oh, yes—I read the *Herald* pretty faithfully," said Miss Newell's parent, shaking out another handful of crumbs.

Garnett cleared his throat. "Then you have no doubt thought it natural that, under the circumstances, they should wish to communicate with you."

The sage continued to fix his attention on the sparrows. "My wife," he remarked, "might have written to me."

"Mrs. Newell was afraid she might not hear from you in reply."

"In reply? Why should she? I suppose she merely wishes to announce the marriage. She knows I have no money left to buy wedding-presents," said Mr. Newell astonishingly.

Garnett felt his colour deepen: he had a vague sense of standing as the representative of something guilty and enormous, with which he had rashly identified himself.

"I don't think you understand," he said. "Mrs. Newell and your daughter have asked me to see you because they're anxious that you should consent to appear at the wedding."

Mr. Newell, at this, ceased to give his attention to the birds, and turned a compassionate gaze on Garnett.

"My dear sir—I don't know your name—" he remarked, "would you mind telling me how long you've been acquainted with Mrs. Newell?" And without waiting for an answer he added: "If you wait long enough she will ask you to do some very disagreeable things for her."

This echo of his own thoughts gave Garnett a twinge of discomfort, but he made shift to answer good-humouredly: "If you refer to my present errand, I must tell you that I don't find it disagreeable to do anything which may be of service to Miss Hermione."

Mr. Newell fumbled in his pocket, as though searching unavailingly for another morsel of bread; then he said: "From her point of view I shall not be the most important person at the ceremony."

Garnett smiled. "That is hardly a reason—" he began; but he was checked by the brevity of tone with which his companion replied: "I am not aware that I am called upon to give you my reasons."

“You are certainly not,” the young man rejoined, “except in so far as you are willing to consider me as the messenger of your wife and daughter.”

“Oh, I accept your credentials,” said the other with his dry smile; “what I don’t recognise is their right to send a message.”

This reduced Garnett to silence, and after a moment’s pause Mr. Newell drew his watch from his pocket.

“I am sorry to cut the conversation short, but my days are mapped out with a certain regularity, and this is the hour for my nap.” He rose as he spoke and held out his hand with a glint of melancholy humour in his small clear eyes.

“You dismiss me, then? I am to take back a refusal?” the young man exclaimed.

“My dear sir, those ladies have got on very well without me for a number of years: I imagine they can put through this wedding without my help.”

“You’re mistaken, then; if it were not for that I shouldn’t have undertaken this errand.”

Mr. Newell paused as he was turning away. “Not for what?” he inquired.

“The fact that, as it happens, the wedding can’t be put through without your help.”

Mr. Newell’s thin lips formed a noiseless whistle. “They’ve got to have my consent, have they? Well, is he a good young man?”

“The bridegroom?” Garnett echoed in surprise. “I hear the best accounts of him—and Miss Newell is very much in love.”

Her parent met this with an odd smile. “Well, then, I give my consent—it’s all I’ve got left to give,” he added philosophically.

Garnett hesitated. “But if you consent—if you approve—why do you refuse your daughter’s request?”

Mr. Newell looked at him a moment. “Ask Mrs. Newell!” he said. And as Garnett was again silent, he turned away with a slight gesture of leave-taking.

But in an instant the young man was at his side. "I will not ask your reasons, sir," he said, "but I will give you mine for being here. Miss Newell cannot be married unless you are present at the ceremony. The young man's parents know that she has a father living, and they give their consent only on condition that he appears at her marriage. I believe it is customary in old French families—"

"Old French families be damned!" said Mr. Newell. "She had better marry an American." And he made a more decided motion to free himself from Garnett's importunities.

But his resistance only strengthened the young man's. The more unpleasant the latter's task became, the more unwilling he grew to see his efforts end in failure. During the three days which had been consumed in his quest it had become clear to him that the bridegroom's parents, having been surprised to a reluctant consent, were but too ready to withdraw it on the plea of Mr. Newell's non-appearance. Mrs. Newell, on the last edge of tension, had confided to Garnett that the Morningfields were "being nasty"; and he could picture the whole powerful clan, on both sides of the Channel, arrayed in a common resolve to exclude poor Hermione from their ranks. The very inequality of the contest stirred his blood, and made him vow that in this case at least the sins of the parents should not be visited on the children. In his talk with the young secretary he had obtained certain glimpses of Baron Schenkelderff's past that fortified this resolve. The Baron, at one time a familiar figure in a much-observed London set, had been mixed up in an ugly money-lending business ending in suicide, which had excluded him from the society most accessible to his race. His alliance with Mrs. Newell was doubtless a desperate attempt at rehabilitation, a forlorn hope on both sides, but likely to be an enduring tie because it represented, to both partners, their last chance of escape from social extinction. That Hermione's marriage was a mere stake in their game did not in the least affect Garnett's view of its urgency. If on their part it was a sordid speculation, to her it had the freshness of the first wooing. If it

made of her a mere pawn in their hands, it would put her, so Garnett hoped, beyond farther risk of such base uses; and to achieve this had become a necessity to him.

The sense that, if he lost sight of Mr. Newell, the latter might not easily be found again, nerved Garnett to hold his ground in spite of the resistance he encountered; and he tried to put the full force of his plea into the tone with which he cried: "Ah, you don't know your daughter!"

VI

Mrs. Newell, that afternoon, met him on the threshold of her sitting-room with a "Well?" of pent-up anxiety.

In the room itself, Baron Schenkelderff sat with crossed legs and head thrown back, in an attitude which he did not see fit to alter at the young man's approach.

Garnett hesitated; but it was not the summariness of the Baron's greeting which he resented.

"You've found him?" Mrs. Newell exclaimed.

"Yes; but—"

She followed his glance and answered it with a slight shrug. "I can't take you into my room, because there's a dress-maker there, and she won't go because she's waiting to be paid. Schenkelderff," she exclaimed, "you're not wanted; please go and look out of the window."

The Baron rose, and, lighting a cigarette, laughingly retired to the embrasure. Mrs. Newell flung herself down and signed to Garnett to take a seat at her side.

"Well—you've found him? You've talked with him?"

"Yes; I've talked with him—for an hour."

She made an impatient movement. "That's too long! Does he refuse?"

"He doesn't consent."

"Then you mean—?"

"He wants time to think it over."

"Time? There *is* no time—did you tell him so?"

"I told him so; but you must remember that he has plenty. He has taken twenty-four hours."

Mrs. Newell groaned. "Oh, that's too much. When he thinks things over he always refuses."

"Well, he would have refused at once if I had not agreed to the delay."

She rose nervously from her seat and pressed her hands to her forehead. "It's too hard, after all I've done! The trousseau is ordered—think how disgraceful! You must have managed him badly; I'll go and see him myself."

The Baron, at this, turned abruptly from his study of the Place Vendôme.

"My dear creature, for heaven's sake don't spoil everything!" he exclaimed.

Mrs. Newell coloured furiously. "What's the meaning of that brilliant speech?"

"I was merely putting myself in the place of a man on whom you have ceased to smile."

He picked up his hat and stick, nodded knowingly to Garnett, and walked toward the door with an air of creaking jauntiness.

But on the threshold Mrs. Newell waylaid him.

"Don't go—I must speak to you," she said, following him into the ante-chamber; and Garnett remembered the dressmaker who was not to be dislodged from her bedroom.

In a moment Mrs. Newell returned, with a small flat packet which she vainly sought to dissemble in an inaccessible pocket.

"He makes everything too odious!" she exclaimed; but whether she referred to her husband or the Baron it was left to Garnett to decide.

She sat silent, nervously twisting her cigarette-case between her fingers, while her visitor rehearsed the details of his conversation with Mr. Newell. He did not indeed tell her the arguments he had

used to shake her husband's resolve, since in his eloquent sketch of Hermione's situation there had perforce entered hints unflattering to her mother; but he gave the impression that his hearer had in the end been moved, and for that reason had consented to defer his refusal.

"Ah, it's not that—it's to prolong our misery!" Mrs. Newell exclaimed; and after a moment she added drearily: "He's been waiting for such an opportunity for years."

It seemed needless for Garnett to protract his visit, and he took leave with the promise to report at once the result of his final talk with Mr. Newell. But as he was passing through the ante-chamber a side door opened and Hermione stood before him. Her face was flushed and shaken out of its usual repose, and he saw at once that she had been waiting for him.

"Mr. Garnett!" she said in a whisper.

He paused, considering her with surprise: he had never supposed her capable of such emotion as her voice and eyes revealed.

"I want to speak to you; we are quite safe here. Mamma is with the dress-maker," she explained, closing the door behind her, while Garnett laid aside his hat and stick.

"I am at your service," he said.

"You have seen my father? Mamma told me that you were to see him to-day," the girl went on, standing close to him in order that she might not have to raise her voice.

"Yes; I've seen him," Garnett replied with increasing wonder. Hermione had never before mentioned her father to him, and it was by a slight stretch of veracity that he had included her name in her mother's plea to Mr. Newell. He had supposed her to be either unconscious of the transaction, or else too much engrossed in her own happiness to give it a thought; and he had forgiven her the last alternative in consideration of the abnormal character of her filial relations. But he now saw that he must readjust his view of her.

"You went to ask him to come to my wedding; I know about it,"

Hermione continued. "Of course it's the custom—people will think it odd if he does not come." She paused, and then asked: "Does he consent?"

"No; he has not yet consented."

"Ah, I thought so when I saw Mamma just now!"

"But he hasn't quite refused—he has promised to think it over."

"But he hated it—he hated the idea?"

Garnett hesitated. "It seemed to arouse painful associations."

"Ah, it would—it would!" she exclaimed.

He was astonished at the passion of her accent; astonished still more at the tone with which she went on, laying her hand on his arm: "Mr. Garnett, he must not be asked—he has been asked too often to do things that he hated!"

Garnett looked at the girl with a shock of awe. What abysses of knowledge did her purity hide?

"But, my dear Miss Hermione—" he began.

"I know what you are going to say," she interrupted him. "It is necessary that he should be present at the marriage, or the du Trayas will break it off. They don't want it very much, at any rate," she added with a strange candour, "and they'll not be sorry, perhaps—for of course Louis would have to obey them."

"So I explained to your father," Garnett assured her.

"Yes—yes; I knew you would put it to him. But that makes no difference. He must not be forced to come unwillingly."

"But if he sees the point—after all, no one can force him!"

"No; but if it's painful to him—if it reminds him too much. . . . Oh, Mr. Garnett, I was not a child when he left us. . . . I was old enough to see . . . to see how it must hurt him even now to be reminded. Peace was all he asked for, and I want him to be left in peace!"

Garnett paused in deep embarrassment. "My dear child, there is no need to remind you that your own future—"

She had a gesture that recalled her mother. "My future must take care of itself; he must not be made to see us!" she said imperatively.

And as Garnett remained silent she went on: "I have always hoped he didn't hate me, but he would hate me now if he were forced to see me."

"Not if he could see you at this moment!"

She lifted her face with swimming eyes.

"Well, go to him, then; tell him what I've said to you!"

Garnett continued to stand before her, deeply struck. "It might be the best thing," he reflected inwardly; but he did not give utterance to the thought. He merely put out his hand, holding Hermione's in a long pressure.

"I will do whatever you wish," he replied.

"You understand that I'm in earnest?" she urged.

"I'm quite sure of it."

"Then I want you to repeat to him what I've said—I want him to be left undisturbed. I don't want him ever to hear of us again!"

*

The next day, at the appointed hour, Garnett resorted to the Luxembourg gardens, which Mr. Newell had named as a meeting-place in preference to his own lodgings. It was clear that he did not wish to admit the young man any farther into his privacy than the occasion required, and the extreme shabbiness of his dress hinted that pride might be the cause of his reluctance.

Garnett found him feeding the sparrows, but he desisted at the young man's approach, and said at once: "You won't thank me for bringing you all this distance."

"If that means that you're going to send me away with a refusal, I have come to spare you the necessity," Garnett answered.

Mr. Newell turned on him a glance of undisguised wonder, in which a tinge of disappointment might almost have been detected.

"Ah—they've got no use for me, after all?" he said ironically.

Garnett, in reply, related without comment his conversation with Hermione, and the message with which she had charged him. He remembered her words exactly and repeated them without

modification, heedless of what they implied or revealed.

Mr. Newell listened with an immovable face, occasionally casting a crumb to his flock. When Garnett ended he asked: "Does her mother know of this?"

"Assuredly not!" cried Garnett with a movement of disgust.

"You must pardon me; but Mrs. Newell is a very ingenious woman." Mr. Newell shook out his remaining crumbs and turned thoughtfully toward Garnett.

"You believe it's quite clear to Hermione that these people will use my refusal as a pretext for backing out of the marriage?"

"Perfectly clear—she told me so herself."

"Doesn't she consider the young man rather chickenhearted?"

"No; he has already put up a big fight for her, and you know the French look at these things differently. He's only twenty-three, and his marrying against his parents' approval is in itself an act of heroism."

"Yes; I believe they look at it that way," Mr. Newell assented. He rose and picked up the half-smoked cigar which he had laid on the bench beside him.

"What do they wear at these French weddings, anyhow? A dress-suit, isn't it?" he asked.

The question was such a surprise to Garnett that for the moment he could only stammer out—"You consent then? I may go and tell her?"

"You may tell my girl—yes." He gave a vague laugh and added: "One way or another, my wife always gets what she wants."

VII

Mr. Newell's consent brought with it no accompanying concessions. In the first flush of his success Garnett had pictured himself as bringing together the father and daughter, and hovering in an attitude of benediction over a family group in which Mrs. Newell did not very distinctly figure.

But Mr. Newell's conditions were inflexible. He would "see the thing through" for his daughter's sake; but he stipulated that in the meantime there should be no meetings or farther communications of any kind. He agreed to be ready when Garnett called for him, at the appointed hour on the wedding-day; but until then he begged to be left alone. To this decision he adhered immovably, and when Garnett conveyed it to Hermione she accepted it with a deep look of understanding. As for Mrs. Newell she was too much engrossed in the nuptial preparations to give her husband another thought. She had gained her point, she had disarmed her foes, and in the first flush of success she had no time to remember by what means her victory had been won. Even Garnett's services received little recognition, unless he found them sufficiently compensated by the new look in Hermione's eyes.

The principal figures in Mrs. Newell's foreground were the Woolsey Hubbards and Baron Schenkelderff. With these she was in hourly consultation, and Mrs. Hubbard went about aureoled with the importance of her close connection with an "aristocratic marriage," and dazzled by the Baron's familiarity with the intricacies of the *Almanach de Gotha*. In his society and Mrs. Newell's, Mrs. Hubbard evidently felt that she had penetrated to the sacred precincts where "the right thing" flourished in its native soil. As for Hermione, her look of happiness had returned, but with an undertint of melancholy, visible perhaps only to Garnett, but to him always hauntingly present. Outwardly she sank back into her passive self, resigned to serve as the brilliant lay-figure on which Mrs. Newell hung the trophies of conquest. Preparations for the wedding were zealously pressed. Mrs. Newell knew the danger of giving people time to think things over, and her fears about her husband being allayed, she began to dread a new attempt at evasion on the part of the bridegroom's family.

"The sooner it's over the sounder I shall sleep!" she declared to Garnett; and all the mitigations of art could not conceal the fact that

she was desperately in need of that restorative. There were moments, indeed, when he was sorrier for her than for her husband or her daughter; so black and unfathomable appeared the abyss into which she must slip back if she lost her hold on this last spar of safety.

But she did not lose her hold; his own experience, as well as her husband's declaration, might have told him that she always got what she wanted. How much she had wanted this particular thing was shown by the way in which, on the last day, when all peril was over, she bloomed out in renovated splendour. It gave Garnett a shivering sense of the ugliness of the alternative which had confronted her.

The day came; the showy coupé provided by Mrs. Newell presented itself punctually at Garnett's door, and the young man entered it and drove to the rue Panonceaux. It was a little melancholy back street, with lean old houses sweating rust and damp, and glimpses of pit-like gardens, black and sunless, between walls bristling with iron spikes. On the narrow pavement a blind man pattered along led by a red-eyed poodle: a little farther on a dishevelled woman sat grinding coffee on the threshold of a *buvette*. The bridal carriage stopped before one of the doorways, with a clatter of hoofs and harness which drew the neighbourhood to its windows, and Garnett started to mount the ill-smelling stairs to the fourth floor, on which he learned from the *concierge* that Mr. Newell lodged. But half-way up he met the latter descending, and they turned and went down together.

Hermione's parent wore his usual imperturbable look, and his eye seemed as full as ever of generalisations on human folly; but there was something oddly shrunken and submerged in his appearance, as though he had grown smaller or his clothes larger. And on the last hypothesis Garnett paused—for it became evident to him that Mr. Newell had hired his dress-suit.

Seated at the young man's side on the satin cushions, he remained silent while the carriage rolled smoothly and rapidly through the network of streets leading to the Boulevard Saint-Germain; only once he

remarked, glancing at the elaborate fittings of the coupé: "Is this Mrs. Newell's carriage?"

"I believe so—yes," Garnett assented, with the guilty sense that in defining that lady's possessions it was impossible not to trespass on those of her friends.

Mr. Newell made no farther comment, but presently requested his companion to rehearse to him once more the exact duties which were to devolve on him during the coming ceremony. Having mastered these he remained silent, fixing a dry speculative eye on the panorama of the brilliant streets, till the carriage drew up at the entrance of Saint Philippe du Roule.

With the same air of composure he followed his guide through the mob of spectators, and up the crimson velvet steps, at the head of which, but for a word from Garnett, a formidable Suisse, glittering with cocked hat and mace, would have checked the advance of the small crumpled figure so oddly out of keeping with the magnificence of the bridal party. The French fashion prescribing that the family *cortège* shall follow the bride to the altar, the vestibule of the church was thronged with the participators in the coming procession; but if Mr. Newell felt any nervousness at his sudden projection into this unfamiliar group, nothing in his look or manner betrayed it. He stood beside Garnett till a white-favoured carriage, dashing up to the church with a superlative glitter of highly groomed horseflesh and silver-plated harness, deposited the snowy apparition of the bride, supported by her mother; then, as Hermione entered the vestibule, he went forward quietly to meet her.

The girl, wrapped in the haze of her bridal veil, and a little confused, perhaps, by the anticipation of the meeting, paused a moment, as if in doubt, before the small oddly-clad figure which blocked her path—a horrible moment to Garnett, who felt a pang of misery at this satire on the infallibility of the filial instinct. He longed to make some sign, to break in some way the pause of uncertainty; but before he could move he saw Mrs. Newell give her

daughter a sharp push, he saw a blush of compunction flood Hermione's face, and the girl, throwing back her veil, bent her tall head and flung her arms about her father.

Mr. Newell emerged unshaken from the embrace: it seemed to have no effect beyond giving an odder twist to his tie. He stood beside his daughter till the church doors were thrown open; then, at a sign from the verger, he gave her his arm, and the strange couple, with the long train of fashion and finery behind them, started on their march to the altar.

Garnett had already slipped into the church and secured a post of vantage which gave him a side-view over the assemblage. The building was thronged—Mrs. Newell had attained her ambition and given Hermione a smart wedding. Garnett's eye travelled curiously from one group to another—from the numerous representatives of the bridegroom's family, all stamped with the same air of somewhat dowdy distinction, the air of having had their thinking done for them for so long that they could no longer perform the act individually, and the heterogeneous company of Mrs. Newell's friends, who presented, on the opposite side of the nave, every variety of individual conviction in dress and conduct. Of the two groups the latter was decidedly the more interesting to Garnett, who observed that it comprised not only such recent acquisitions as the Woolsey Hubbards and the Baron, but also sundry more important figures which of late had faded to the verge of Mrs. Newell's horizon. Hermione's marriage had drawn them back, had once more made her mother a social entity, had in short already accomplished the object for which it had been planned and executed.

And as he looked about him Garnett saw that all the other actors in the show faded into insignificance beside the dominant figure of Mrs. Newell, became mere marionettes pulled hither and thither by the hidden wires of her intention. One and all they were there to serve her ends and accomplish her purpose: Schenkelderff and the Hubbards to pay for the show, the bride and bridegroom to seal and

symbolize her social rehabilitation, Garnett himself as the humble instrument adjusting the different parts of the complicated machinery, and her husband, finally, as the last stake in her game, the last asset on which she could draw to rebuild her fallen fortunes. At the thought Garnett was filled with a deep disgust for what the scene signified, and for his own share in it. He had been her tool and dupe like the others; if he imagined that he was serving Hermione, it was for her mother's ends that he had worked. What right had he to sentimentalise a marriage founded on such base connivances, and how could he have imagined that in so doing he was acting a disinterested part?

While these thoughts were passing through his mind the ceremony had already begun, and the principal personages in the drama were ranged before him in the row of crimson velvet chairs which fills the foreground of a Catholic marriage. Through the glow of lights and the perfumed haze about the altar, Garnett's eyes rested on the central figures of the group, and gradually the others disappeared from his view and his mind. After all, neither Mrs. Newell's schemes nor his own share in them could ever unsanctify Hermione's marriage. It was one more testimony to life's indefatigable renewals, to nature's secret of drawing fragrance from corruption; and as his eyes turned from the girl's illuminated presence to the resigned and stoical figure sunk in the adjoining chair, it occurred to him that he had perhaps worked better than he knew in placing them, if only for a moment, side by side.

The Pretext

MRS. RANSOM, when the front door had closed on her visitor, passed with a spring from the drawing-room to the narrow hall, and thence up the narrow stairs to her bedroom.

Though slender, and still light of foot, she did not always move so quickly: hitherto, in her life, there had not been much to hurry for, save the recurring domestic tasks that compel haste without fostering elasticity; but some impetus of youth revived, communicated to her by her talk with Guy Dawnish, now found expression in her girlish flight upstairs, her girlish impatience to bolt herself into her room with her throbs and her blushes.

Her blushes? Was she really blushing?

She approached the cramped eagle-topped mirror above her plain prim dressing-table: just such a meagre concession to the weakness of the flesh as every old-fashioned house in Wentworth counted among its relics. The face reflected in this unflattering surface—for even the mirrors of Wentworth erred on the side of depreciation—did not seem, at first sight, a suitable theatre for the display of the tenderer emotions, and its owner blushed more deeply as the fact was forced upon her.

Her fair hair had grown too thin—it no longer quite hid the blue veins in the candid forehead that one seemed to see turned toward professorial desks, in large bare halls where a snowy winter light fell uncompromisingly on rows of “thoughtful women.” Her mouth was thin, too, and a little strained; her lips were too pale; and there were lines in the corners of her eyes. It was a face which had grown

middle-aged while it waited for the joys of youth.

Well—but if she could still blush? Instinctively she drew back a little, so that her scrutiny became less microscopic, and the pretty lingering pink threw a veil over her pallour, the hollows in her temples, the faint wrinkles of inexperience about her lips and eyes. How a little colour helped! It made her eyes so deep and shining. She saw now why bad women rouged. . . . her redness deepened at the thought.

But suddenly she noticed for the first time that the collar of her dress was too low. It showed the shrunken lines of the throat. She rummaged feverishly in a tidy scentless drawer, and snatching out a bit of black velvet, bound it about her neck. Yes—that was better. It gave her the relief she needed. Relief—contrast—that was it! She had never had any, either in her appearance or in her setting. She was as flat as the pattern of the wall-paper—and so was her life. And all the people about her had the same look. Wentworth was the kind of place where husbands and wives gradually grew to resemble each other—one or two of her friends, she remembered, had told her lately that she and Ransom were beginning to look alike. . . .

But why had she always, so tamely, allowed her aspect to conform to her situation? Perhaps a gayer exterior would have provoked a brighter fate. Even now—she turned back to the glass, loosened her tight strands of hair, ran the fine end of the comb under them with a frizzing motion, and then disposed them, more lightly and amply, above her eager face. Yes—it was really better; it made a difference. She smiled at herself with a timid coquetry, and her lips seemed rosier as she smiled. Then she laid down the comb and the smile faded. It made a difference, certainly—but was it right to try to make one's hair look thicker and wavier than it really was? Between that and rouging the ethical line seemed almost imperceptible, and the spectre of her rigid New England ancestry rose reprovingly before her. She was sure that none of her grandmothers had ever simulated a curl or encouraged a blush. A blush, indeed! What had any of them

ever had to blush for in all their frozen lives? And what, in Heaven's name, had she? She sat down in the stiff mahogany rocking-chair beside her work-table and tried to collect herself. From childhood she had been taught to "collect herself"—but never before had her small sensations and aspirations been so widely scattered, diffused over so vague and uncharted an expanse. Hitherto they had lain in neatly sorted and easily accessible bundles on the high shelves of a perfectly ordered moral consciousness. And now—now that for the first time they *needed* collecting—now that the little winged and scattered bits of self were dancing madly down the vagrant winds of fancy, she knew no spell to call them to the fold again. The best way, no doubt—if only her bewilderment permitted—was to go back to the beginning—the beginning, at least, of to-day's visit—to recapitulate, word for word and look for look. . . .

She clasped her hands on the arms of the chair, checked its swaying with a thrust of her foot, and fixed her eyes on the inward vision. . . .

To begin with, what had made to-day's visit so different from the others? It became suddenly vivid to her that there had been many, almost daily, others, since Guy Dawnish's coming to Wentworth. Even the previous winter—the winter of his arrival from England—his visits had been numerous enough to make Wentworth aware that—very naturally—Mrs. Ransom was "looking after" the stray young Englishman committed to her husband's care by an eminent Q. C. whom the Ransoms had known on one of their London visits, and with whom Ransom had since maintained professional relations. All this was in the natural order of things, as sanctioned by the social code of Wentworth. Every one was kind to Guy Dawnish—some rather importunately so, as Margaret Ransom had smiled to observe—but it was recognised as fitting that she should be kindest, since he was in a sense her property, since his people in England, by profusely acknowledging her kindness, had given it the domestic sanction without which, to Wentworth, any social relation between the sexes

remained unhallowed and to be viewed askance. Yes! And even this second winter, when the visits had become so much more frequent, so admitted a part of the day's routine, there had not been, from any one, a hint of surprise or of conjecture.

Mrs. Ransom smiled with a faint bitterness. She was protected by her age, no doubt—her age and her past, and the image her mirror gave back to her. . . .

Her door-handle turned suddenly, and the bolt's resistance was met by an impatient knock.

"Margaret!"

She started up, her brightness fading, and unbolted the door to admit her husband.

"Why are you locked in? Why, you're not dressed yet!" he exclaimed.

It was possible for Ransom to reach his dressing-room by a slight circuit through the passage; but it was characteristic of the relentless domesticity of their relation that he chose, as a matter of course, the directer way through his wife's bedroom. She had never before been disturbed by this practice, which she accepted as inevitable, but had merely adapted her own habits to it, delaying her hasty toilet till he was safe in his room, or completing it before she heard his step on the stair; since a scrupulous traditional prudery had miraculously survived this massacre of all the privacies.

"Oh, I shan't dress this evening—I shall just have some tea in the library after you've gone," she answered absently. "Your things are laid out," she added, rousing herself.

He looked surprised. "The dinner's at seven. I suppose the speeches will begin at nine. I thought you were coming to hear them."

She wavered. "I don't know. I think not. Mrs. Sperry's ill, and I've no one else to go with."

He glanced at his watch. "Why not get hold of Dawnish? Wasn't he here just now? Why didn't you ask him?"

She turned toward her dressing-table and straightened the comb

and brush with a nervous hand. Her husband had given her, that morning, two tickets for the ladies' gallery in Hamblin Hall, where the great public dinner of the evening was to take place—a banquet offered by the faculty of Wentworth to visitors of academic eminence—and she had meant to ask Dawnish to go with her: it had seemed the most natural thing to do, till the end of his visit came, and then, after all, she had not spoken. . . .

"It's too late now," she murmured, bending over her pincushion.

"Too late? Not if you telephone him."

Her husband came toward her, and she turned quickly to face him, lest he should suspect her of trying to avoid his eye. To what duplicity was she already committed!

Ransom laid a friendly hand on her arm: "Come along, Margaret. You know I speak for the bar." She was aware, in his voice, of a little note of surprise at his having to remind her of this.

"Oh, yes. I meant to go, of course—"

"Well, then—" He opened his dressing-room door, and caught a glimpse of the retreating house-maid's skirt. "Here's Maria now. Maria! Call up Mr. Dawnish—at Mrs. Creswell's, you know. Tell him Mrs. Ransom wants him to go with her to hear the speeches this evening—the *speeches*, you understand?—and he's to call for her at a quarter before nine."

Margaret heard the Irish "Yessir" on the stairs, and stood motionless while her husband added loudly: "And bring me some towels when you come up." Then he turned back into his wife's room.

"Why, it would be a thousand pities for Guy to miss this. He's so interested in the way we do things over here—and I don't know that he's ever heard me speak in public." Again the slight note of fatuity! Was it possible that Ransom was fatuous?

He paused in front of her, his short-sighted unobservant glance turned unexpectedly on her face.

"You're not going like that, are you?" he asked, with glaring eye-

glasses.

“Like what?” she faltered, lifting a conscious hand to the velvet at her throat.

“With your hair in such a fearful mess. Have you been shampooing it? You look like the Brant girl at the end of a tennis-match.”

The Brant girl was their horror—the horror of all right-thinking Wentworth; a laced, whale-boned, frizzle-headed, high-heeled daughter of iniquity, who came—from New York, of course—on long disturbing tumultuous visits to a Wentworth aunt, working havoc among the freshmen, and leaving, when she departed, an angry wake of criticism that ruffled the social waters for weeks. *She*, too, had tried her hand at Guy—with ludicrous unsuccess. And now, to be compared to her—to be accused of looking “New Yorky!” Ah, there are times when husbands are obtuse; and Ransom, as he stood there, thick and yet juiceless, in his dry legal middle age, with his wiry dust-coloured beard and his perpetual *pince-nez*, seemed to his wife a sudden embodiment of this traditional attribute. Not that she had ever fancied herself, poor soul, a “*femme incomprise*.” She had, on the contrary, prided herself on being understood by her husband almost as much as on her own complete comprehension of him. Wentworth laid a good deal of stress on “motives”; and Margaret Ransom and her husband had dwelt in complete community of motive. It had been the proudest day of her life when, without consulting her, he had refused an offer of partnership in an eminent New York firm because he preferred the distinction of practising in Wentworth, of being known as the legal representative of the University. Wentworth, in fact, had always been the bond between the two; they were united in their veneration for that estimable seat of learning, and in their modest yet vivid consciousness of possessing its tone. The Wentworth “tone” is unmistakable: it permeates every part of the social economy, from the *coiffure* of the ladies to the preparation of the food. It has its sumptuary laws as well as its curriculum of learning. It sits in judgment not only on its own townsmen but on the

rest of the world—enlightening, criticising, ostracising a heedless universe—and nonconformity to Wentworth standards involves obliteration from Wentworth's consciousness.

In a world without traditions, without reverence, without stability, such little expiring centres of prejudice and precedent make an irresistible appeal to those instincts for which a democracy has neglected to provide. Wentworth, with its "tone," its backward references, its inflexible aversions and condemnations, its hard moral outline preserved intact against a whirling background of experiment, had been all the poetry and history of Margaret Ransom's life. Yes, what she had really esteemed in her husband was the fact of his being so intense an embodiment of Wentworth; so long and closely identified, for instance, with its legal affairs, that he was almost a part of its university existence, that of course, at a college banquet, he would inevitably speak for the bar!

It was wonderful of how much consequence all this had seemed till now. . . .

II

When, punctually at ten minutes to seven, her husband had emerged from the house, Margaret Ransom remained seated in her bedroom, addressing herself anew to the difficult process of self-collection. As an aid to this endeavour, she bent forward and looked out of the window, following Ransom's figure as it receded down the elm-shaded street. He moved almost alone between the prim flowerless grass-plots, the white porches, the protrusion of irrelevant shingled gables, which stamped the empty street as part of an American college town. She had always been proud of living in Hill Street, where the university people congregated, proud to associate her husband's retreating back, as he walked daily to his office, with backs literary and pedagogic, backs of which it was whispered, for the edification of duly-impressed visitors: "Wait till that old boy turns—that's so-and-so."

This had been her world, a world destitute of personal experience, but filled with a rich sense of privilege and distinction, of being not as those millions were who, denied the inestimable advantage of living at Wentworth, pursued elsewhere careers foredoomed to futility.

And now—!

She rose and turned to her work-table, where she had dropped, on entering, the handful of photographs that Guy Dawnish had left with her. While he sat so close, pointing out and explaining, she had hardly taken in the details; but now, on the full tones of his low young voice, they came back with redoubled distinctness. This was Guise Abbey, his uncle's place in Wiltshire, where, under his grandfather's rule, Guy's own boyhood had been spent: a long gabled Jacobean façade, many-chimneyed, ivy-draped, overhung (she felt sure) by the boughs of a venerable rookery. And in this other picture—the walled garden at Guise—that was his uncle, Lord Askern, a hale gouty-looking figure, planted robustly on the terrace, a gun on his shoulder and a couple of setters at his feet. And here was the river below the park, with Guy “punting” a girl in a flapping hat—how Margaret hated the flap that hid the girl's face! And here was the tennis-court, with Guy among a jolly cross-legged group of youths in flannels, and pretty girls about the tea-table under the big lime: in the centre the curate handing bread and butter, and in the middle distance a footman approaching with more cups.

Margaret raised this picture closer to her eyes, puzzling, in the diminished light, over the face of the girl nearest to Guy Dawnish—bent above him in profile, while he laughingly lifted his head. No hat hid this profile, which stood out clearly against the foliage behind it.

“And who is that handsome girl?” Margaret had said, detaining the photograph as he pushed it aside, and struck by the fact that, of the whole group, he had left only this member unnamed.

“Oh, only Gwendolen Matcher—I've always known her—. Look at this: the almshouses at Guise. Aren't they jolly?”

And then—without her having had the courage to ask if the girl in the punt were also Gwendolen Matcher—they passed on to photographs of his rooms at Oxford, of a cousin's studio in London—one of Lord Askern's grandsons was "artistic"—of the rose-hung cottage in Wales to which, on the old Earl's death, his daughter-in-law, Guy's mother, had retired.

Every one of the photographs opened a window on the life Margaret had been trying to picture since she had known him—a life so rich, so romantic, so packed—in the mere casual vocabulary of daily life—with historic reference and poetic allusion, that she felt almost oppressed by this distant whiff of its air. The very words he used fascinated and bewildered her. He seemed to have been born into all sorts of connections, political, historical, official, that made the Ransom situation at Wentworth as featureless as the top-shelf of a dark closet. Some one in the family had "asked for the Chiltern Hundreds"—one uncle was an Elder Brother of the Trinity House—some one else was the Master of a College—some one was in command at Devonport—the Army, the Navy, the House of Commons, the House of Lords, the most venerable seats of learning, were all woven into the dense background of this young man's light unconscious talk. For the unconsciousness was unmistakable. Margaret was not without experience of the transatlantic visitor who sounds loud names and evokes reverberating connections. The poetry of Guy Dawnish's situation lay in the fact that it was so completely a part of early associations and accepted facts. Life was like that in England—in Wentworth, of course (where he had been sent, through his uncle's influence, for two years' training in the neighbouring electrical works at Smedden)—in Wentworth, though "immensely jolly," it was different. The fact that he was qualifying to be an electrical engineer—with the hope of a secretaryship at the London end of the great Smedden Company—that, at best, he was returning home to a life of industrial "grind," this fact, though avowedly a bore, did not disconnect him from that brilliant pinnacled past, that

many-faceted existence in which the brightest episodes of the whole body of English fiction seemed collectively reflected. Of course he would have to work—younger sons' sons almost always had to—but his uncle Askern (like Wentworth) was “immensely jolly,” and Guise always open to him, and his other uncle, the Master, a capital old boy too—and in town he could always put up with his clever aunt, Lady Caroline Duckett, who had made a “beastly marriage” and was horribly poor, but who knew everybody jolly and amusing, and had always been particularly kind to him.

It was not—and Margaret had not, even in her own thoughts, to defend herself from the imputation—it was not what Wentworth would have called the “material side” of her friend's situation that captivated her. She was austere proof against such appeals: her enthusiasms were all of the imaginative order. What subjugated her was the unexampled prodigality with which he poured for her the same draught of tradition of which Wentworth held out its little teacupful. He besieged her with a million Wentworths in one—saying, as it were: “All these are mine for the asking—and I choose you instead!”

For this, she told herself somewhat dizzily, was what it came to—the summing-up toward which her conscientious efforts at self-collection had been gradually pushing her: with all this in reach, Guy Dawnish was leaving Wentworth reluctantly.

“I *was* a bit lonely here at first—but *now!*” And again: “It will be jolly, of course, to see them all again—but there are some things one doesn't easily give up. . . .”

If he had known only Wentworth, it would have been wonderful enough that he should have chosen her out of all Wentworth—but to have known that other life, and to set her in the balance against it—poor Margaret Ransom, in whom, at the moment, nothing seemed of weight but her years! Ah, it might well produce, in nerves, and brain, and poor unpractised pulses, a flushed tumult of sensation, the rush of a great wave of life, under which memory struggled in vain to

reassert itself, to particularise again just what his last words—the very last—had been. . . .

When consciousness emerged, quivering, from this retrospective assault, it pushed Margaret Ransom—feeling herself a mere leaf in the blast—toward the writing-table from which her innocent and voluminous correspondence habitually flowed. She had a letter to write now—much shorter but more difficult than any she had ever been called on to indite.

“Dear Mr. Dawnish,” she began, “since telephoning you just now I have decided not—”

Maria’s voice, at the door, announced that tea was in the library: “And I s’pose it’s the brown silk you’ll wear to the speaking?”

In the usual order of the Ransom existence, its mistress’s toilet was performed unassisted; and the mere enquiry—at once friendly and deferential—projected, for Margaret, a strong light on the importance of the occasion. That she should answer “But I am not going,” when the going was so manifestly part of a household solemnity about which the thoughts below stairs fluttered in proud participation; that in face of such participation she should utter a word implying indifference or hesitation—nay, revealing herself the transposed uprooted thing she had been on the verge of becoming; to do this was—well! infinitely harder than to perform the alternative act of tearing up the sheet of note-paper under her reluctant pen.

Yes, she said, she would wear the brown silk. . . .

III

All the heat and glare from the long illuminated table, about which the fumes of many courses still hung in a savoury fog, seemed to surge up to the ladies’ gallery, and concentrate themselves in the burning cheeks of a slender figure withdrawn behind the projection of a pillar.

It never occurred to Margaret Ransom that she was sitting in the

shade. She supposed that the full light of the chandeliers was beating on her face—and there were moments when it seemed as though all the heads about the great horse-shoe below, bald, shaggy, sleek, close-thatched, or thinly latticed, were equipped with an additional pair of eyes, set at an angle which enabled them to rake her face as relentlessly as the electric burners.

In the lull after a speech, the gallery was fluttering with the rustle of programmes consulted, and Mrs. Sheff (the Brant girl's aunt) leaned forward to say enthusiastically: "And now we're to hear Mr. Ransom!"

A louder buzz rose from the table, and the heads (without relaxing their upward vigilance) seemed to merge and flow together, like an attentive flood, toward the upper end of the horse-shoe, where all the threads of Margaret Ransom's consciousness were suddenly drawn into what seemed a small speck, no more—a black speck that rose, hung in air, dissolved into gyrating gestures, became distended, enormous, preponderant—became her husband "speaking."

"It's the heat—" Margaret gasped, pressing her handkerchief to her whitening lips, and finding just strength enough left to push back farther into the shadow.

She felt a touch on her arm. "It is horrible—shall we go?" a voice suggested; and, "Yes, yes, let us go," she whispered, feeling, with a great throb of relief, *that* to be the only possible, the only conceivable, solution. To sit and listen to her husband *now*—how could she ever have thought she could survive it? Luckily, under the lingering hubbub from below, his opening words were inaudible, and she had only to run the gauntlet of sympathetic feminine glances, shot after her between waving fans and programmes, as, guided by Guy Dawnish, she managed to reach the door. It was really so hot that even Mrs. Sheff was not much surprised—till long afterward. . . .

The winding staircase was empty, half dark and blessedly silent. In a committee room below Dawnish found the inevitable water jug,

and filled a glass for her, while she leaned back, confronted only by a frowning college President in an emblazoned frame. The academic frown descended on her like an anathema when she rose and followed her companion out of the building.

Hamblin Hall stands at the end of the long green "Campus" with its sextuple line of elms—the boast and singularity of Wentworth. A pale spring moon, rising above the dome of the University Library, at the opposite end of the elm-walk, diffused a pearly mildness in the sky, melted to thin haze the shadows of the trees, and turned to golden yellow the lights of the college windows. Against this soft suffusion of light the Library cupola assumed a Bramantesque grace, the white steeple of the congregational church became a campanile topped by a winged spirit, and the scant porticoes of the older halls the colonnades of classic temples.

"This is better—" Dawnish said, as they passed down the steps and under the shadow of the elms.

They moved on a little way in silence before he began again: "You're too tired to walk. Let us sit down a few minutes."

Her feet, in truth, were leaden, and not far off a group of park benches, encircling the pedestal of a patriot in bronze, invited them to rest. But Dawnish was guiding her toward a lateral path which bent, through shrubberies, toward a strip of turf between two buildings.

"It will be cooler by the river," he said, moving on without waiting for a possible protest. None came: it seemed easier, for the moment, to let herself be led without any conventional feint of resistance. And besides, there was nothing wrong about *this*—the wrong would have been in sitting up there in the glare, pretending to listen to her husband, a dutiful wife among her kind. . . .

The path descended, as both knew, to the chosen, the inimitable spot of Wentworth: that fugitive curve of the river, where, before hurrying on to glut the brutal industries of South Wentworth and Smedden, it simulated for a few hundred yards the leisurely pace of

an ancient university stream, with willows on its banks and a stretch of turf extending from the grounds of Hamblin Hall to the boat houses at the farther bend. Here, too, were benches beneath the willows, and so close to the river that the voice of its gliding softened and filled out the reverberating silence between Margaret and her companion, and made her feel that she knew why he had brought her there.

“Do you feel better?” he asked gently as he sat down beside her.

“Oh, yes. I only needed a little air.”

“I’m so glad you did. Of course the speeches were tremendously interesting—but I prefer this. What a good night!”

“Yes.”

There was a pause, which now, after all, the soothing accompaniment of the river seemed hardly sufficient to fill.

“I wonder what time it is. I ought to be going home,” Margaret began at length.

“Oh, it’s not late. They’ll be at it for hours in there—yet.”

She made a faint inarticulate sound. She wanted to say: “No—Robert’s speech was to be the last—” but she could not bring herself to pronounce Ransom’s name, and at the moment no other way of refuting her companion’s statement occurred to her.

The young man leaned back luxuriously, reassured by her silence.

“You see it’s my last chance—and I want to make the most of it.”

“Your last chance?” How stupid of her to repeat his words on that cooing note of interrogation! It was just such a lead as the Brant girl might have given him.

“To be with you—like this. I haven’t had so many. And there’s less than a week left.”

She attempted to laugh. “Perhaps it will sound longer if you call it five days.”

The flatness of that, again! And she knew there were people who called her intelligent. Fortunately he did not seem to notice it; but her laugh continued to sound in her own ears—the coquettish chirp

of middle age! She decided that if he spoke again—if he *said anything*—she would make no farther effort at evasion: she would take it directly, seriously, frankly—she would not be doubly disloyal.

“Besides,” he continued, throwing his arm along the back of the bench, and turning toward her so that his face was like a dusky bas-relief with a silver rim—“besides, there’s something I’ve been wanting to tell you.”

The sound of the river seemed to cease altogether: the whole world became silent.

Margaret had trusted her inspiration farther than it appeared likely to carry her. Again she could think of nothing happier than to repeat, on the same witless note of interrogation: “To tell me?”

“You only.”

The constraint, the difficulty, seemed to be on his side now: she divined it by the renewed shifting of his attitude—he was capable, usually, of such fine intervals of immobility—and by a confusion in his utterance that set her own voice throbbing in her throat.

“You’ve been so perfect to me,” he began again. “It’s not my fault if you’ve made me feel that you would understand everything—make allowances for everything—see just how a man may have held out, and fought against a thing—as long as he had the strength. . . . This may be my only chance; and I can’t go away without telling you.”

He had turned from her now, and was staring at the river, so that his profile was projected against the moonlight in all its beautiful young dejection.

There was a slight pause, as though he waited for her to speak; then she leaned forward and laid her hand on his.

“If I have really been—if I have done for you even the least part of what you say . . . what you imagine . . . will you do for me, now, just one thing in return?”

He sat motionless, as if fearing to frighten away the shy touch on his hand, and she left it there, conscious of her gesture only as part of the high ritual of their farewell.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked in a low tone.

"Not to tell me!" she breathed on a deep note of entreaty.

"Not to tell you—?"

"Anything—*anything*—just to leave our . . . our friendship . . . as it has been—as—as a painter, if a friend asked him, might leave a picture—not quite finished, perhaps, . . . but all the more exquisite. . . ."

She felt the hand under hers slip away, recover itself, and seek her own, which had flashed out of reach in the same instant—felt the start that swept him round on her as if he had been caught and turned about by the shoulders.

"You—you—?" he stammered, in a strange voice full of fear and tenderness; but she held fast, so centred in her inexorable resolve that she was hardly conscious of the effect her words might be producing.

"Don't you see," she hurried on, "don't you *feel* how much safer it is—yes, I'm willing to put it so!—how much safer to leave everything undisturbed . . . just as . . . as it has grown of itself . . . without trying to say: 'It's this or that'. . . ? It's what we each choose to call it to ourselves, after all, isn't it? Don't let us try to find a name that . . . that we should both agree upon . . . we probably shouldn't succeed." She laughed abruptly. "And ghosts vanish when one names them!" she ended with a break in her voice.

When she ceased her heart was beating so violently that there was a rush in her ears like the noise of the river after rain, and she did not immediately make out what he was answering. But as she recovered her lucidity she said to herself that, whatever he was saying, she must not hear it; and she began to speak again, half playfully, half appealingly, with an eloquence of entreaty, an ingenuity in argument, of which she had never dreamed herself capable. And then, suddenly, strangling hands seemed to reach up from her heart to her throat, and she had to stop.

Her companion remained motionless. He had not tried to regain

her hand, and his eyes were away from her, on the river. But his nearness had become something formidable and exquisite—something she had never before imagined. A flush of guilt swept over her—vague reminiscences of French novels and of opera plots. This was what such women felt, then . . . this was “shame.” . . . Phrases of the newspaper and the pulpit danced before her. . . . She dared not speak, and his silence began to frighten her. Had ever a heart beat so wildly before in Wentworth?

He turned at last, and taking her two hands, quite simply, kissed them one after the other.

“I shall never forget—” he said in a confused voice, unlike his own.

A return of strength enabled her to rise, and even to let her eyes meet his for a moment.

“Thank you,” she said, simply also.

She turned away from the bench, regaining the path that led back to the college buildings, and he walked beside her in silence. When they reached the elm walk it was dotted with dispersing groups. The “speaking” was at an end, and Hamblin Hall had poured its audience out into the moonlight. Margaret felt a rush of relief, followed by a receding wave of regret. She had the distinct sensation that her hour—her one hour—was over.

One of the groups just ahead broke up as they approached, and projected Ransom’s solid bulk against the moonlight.

“My husband,” she said, hastening forward; and she never afterward forgot the look of his back—heavy, round-shouldered, yet a little pompous—in a badly fitting overcoat that stood out at the neck and hid his collar. She had never before noticed how he dressed.

IV

They met again, inevitably, before Dawnish left; but the thing she feared did not happen—he did not try to see her alone.

It even became clear to her, in looking back, that he had

deliberately avoided doing so; and this seemed merely an added proof of his "understanding," of that deep undefinable communion that set them alone in an empty world, as if on a peak above the clouds.

The five days passed in a flash; and when the last one came, it brought to Margaret Ransom an hour of weakness, of profound disorganisation, when old barriers fell, old convictions faded—when to be alone with him for a moment became, after all, the one craving of her heart. She knew he was coming that afternoon to say "good-bye"—and she knew also that Ransom was to be away at South Wentworth. She waited alone in her pale little drawing-room, with its scant kakemonos, its one or two chilly reproductions from the antique, its slippery Chippendale chairs. At length the bell rang, and her world became a rosy cloud—through which she presently discerned the austere form of Mrs. Sperry, wife of the Professor of palæontology, who had come to talk over with her the next winter's programme for the Higher Thought Club. They debated the question for an hour, and when Mrs. Sperry departed Margaret had a confused impression that the course was to deal with the influence of the First Crusade on the development of European architecture—but the sentient part of her knew only that Dawnish had not come.

He "bobbed in," as he would have put it, after dinner—having, it appeared, run across Ransom early in the day, and learned that the latter would be absent till evening. Margaret was in the study with her husband when the door opened and Dawnish stood there. Ransom—who had not had time to dress—was seated at his desk, a pile of shabby law books at his elbow, the light from a hanging lamp falling on his grayish stubble of hair, his sallow forehead and spectacled eyes. Dawnish, towering higher than usual against the shadows of the room, and refined by his unusual pallour, hung a moment on the threshold, then came in, explaining himself profusely—laughing, accepting a cigar, letting Ransom push an armchair forward—a Dawnish she had never seen, ill at ease, ejaculatory, yet

somehow more mature, more obscurely in command of himself.

Margaret drew back, seating herself in the shade, in such a way that she saw her husband's head first, and beyond it their visitor's, relieved against the dusk of the book shelves. Her heart was still—she felt no throbbing in her throat or temples: all her life seemed concentrated in the hand that lay on her knee, the hand he would touch when they said good-bye.

Afterward her heart rang all the changes, and there was a mood in which she reproached herself for cowardice—for having deliberately missed her one moment with him, the moment in which she might have sounded the depths of life, for joy or anguish. But that mood was fleeting and infrequent. In quieter hours she blushed for it—she even trembled to think that he might have guessed such a regret in her. It seemed to convict her of a lack of fineness that he should have had, in his youth and his power, a tenderer, surer sense of the peril of a rash touch—should have handled the case so much more delicately.

At first her days were fire and the nights long solemn vigils. Her thoughts were no longer vulgarised and defaced by any notion of “guilt.” She was ashamed now of her shame. What had happened was as much outside the sphere of her marriage as some transaction in a star. It had simply given her a secret life of incommunicable joys, as if all the wasted springs of her youth had been stored in some hidden pool, and she could return there now to bathe in them.

After that there came a phase of loneliness, through which the life about her loomed phantasmal and remote. She thought the dead must feel thus, repeating the vain gestures of the living beside some Stygian shore. She wondered if any other woman had lived to whom *nothing had ever happened?* And then his first letter came. . . .

It was a charming letter—a perfect letter. The little touch of awkwardness and constraint under its boyish spontaneity told her more than whole pages of eloquence. He spoke of their friendship—

of their good days together . . . Ransom, chancing to come in while she read, noticed the foreign stamps; and she was able to hand him the letter, saying gaily: "There's a message for you," and knowing all the while that *her* message was safe in her heart.

On the days when the letters came the outlines of things grew indistinct, and she could never afterward remember what she had done or how the business of life had been carried on. It was always a surprise when she found dinner on the table as usual, and Ransom seated opposite to her, running over the evening paper.

But though Dawnish continued to write, with all the English loyalty to the outward observances of friendship, his communications came only at intervals of several weeks, and between them she had time to repossess herself, to regain some sort of normal contact with life. And the customary, the recurring, gradually reclaimed her, the net of habit tightened again—her daily life became real, and her one momentary escape from it an exquisite illusion. Not that she ceased to believe in the miracle that had befallen her; she still treasured the reality of her one moment beside the river. What reason was there for doubting it? She could hear the ring of truth in young Dawnish's voice: "It's not my fault if you've made me feel that you would understand everything. . . ." No! she believed in her miracle, and the belief sweetened and illumined her life; but she came to see that what was for her the transformation of her whole being might well have been, for her companion, a mere passing explosion of gratitude, of boyish good-fellowship touched with the pang of leave-taking. She even reached the point of telling herself that it was "better so": this view of the episode so defended it from the alternating extremes of self-reproach and derision, so enshrined it in a pale immortality to which she could make her secret pilgrimages without reproach.

For a long time she had not been able to pass by the bench under the willows—she even avoided the elm walk till autumn had stripped its branches. But every day, now, she noted a step toward recovery; and at last a day came when, walking along the river, she said to

herself, as she approached the bench: "I used not to be able to pass here without thinking of him; *and now I am not thinking of him at all!*"

This seemed such convincing proof of her recovery that she began, as spring returned, to permit herself, now and then, a quiet session on the bench—a dedicated hour from which she went back fortified to her task.

She had not heard from her friend for six weeks or more—the intervals between his letters were growing longer. But that was "best" too, and she was not anxious, for she knew he had obtained the post he had been preparing for, and that his active life in London had begun. The thought reminded her, one mild March day, that in leaving the house she had thrust in her reticule a letter from a Wentworth friend who was abroad on a holiday. The envelope bore the London post mark, a fact showing that the lady's face was turned toward home. Margaret seated herself on her bench, and began to read the letter.

The London described was that of shops and museums—as remote as possible from the setting of Guy Dawnish's existence. But suddenly Margaret's eye fell on his name, and the page began to tremble in her hands.

"I heard such a funny thing yesterday about your friend Mr. Dawnish. We went to a tea at Professor Bunce's (I do wish you knew the Bunces—their atmosphere is so *uplifting*), and there I met that Miss Bruce-Pringle who came out last year to take a course in histology at the Annex. Of course she asked about you and Mr. Ransom, and then she told me she had just seen Mr. Dawnish's aunt—the clever one he was always talking about, Lady Caroline something—and that they were all in a dreadful state about him. I wonder if you knew he was engaged when he went to America? He never mentioned it to *us*. She said it was not a positive engagement, but an understanding with a girl he has always been devoted to, who lives near their place in Wiltshire; and both families expected the marriage to take place as soon as he got back. It seems the girl is an

heiress (you know *how low* the English ideals are compared with ours), and Miss Bruce-Pringle said his relations were perfectly delighted at his 'being provided for,' as she called it. Well, when he got back he asked the girl to release him; and she and her family were furious, and so were his people; but he holds out, and won't marry her, and won't give a reason, except that he has 'formed an unfortunate attachment.' Did you ever hear anything so peculiar? His aunt, who is quite wild about it, says it must have happened at Wentworth, because he didn't go anywhere else in America. Do you suppose it *could* have been the Brant girl? But why 'unfortunate' when everybody knows she would have jumped at him?"

Margaret folded the letter and looked out across the river. It was not the same river, but a mystic current shot with moonlight. The bare willows wove a leafy veil above her head, and beside her she felt the nearness of youth and tempestuous tenderness. It had all happened just here, on this very seat by the river—it had come to her, and passed her by, and she had not held out a hand to detain it.

...

Well! Was it not, by that very abstention, made more deeply and ineffaceably hers? She could argue thus while she had thought the episode, on his side, a mere transient effect of propinquity; but now that she knew it had altered the whole course of his life, now that it took on substance and reality, asserted a separate existence outside of her own troubled consciousness—now it seemed almost cowardly to have missed her share in it.

She walked home in a dream. Now and then, when she passed an acquaintance, she wondered if the pain and glory were written on her face. But Mrs. Sperry, who stopped her at the corner of Maverick Street to say a word about the next meeting of the Higher Thought Club, seemed to remark no change in her.

When she reached home Ransom had not yet returned from the office, and she went straight to the library to tidy his writing-table. It was part of her daily duty to bring order out of the chaos of his

papers, and of late she had fastened on such small recurring tasks as some one falling over a precipice might snatch at the weak bushes in its clefts.

When she had sorted the letters she took up some pamphlets and newspapers, glancing over them to see if they were to be kept. Among the papers was a page torn from a London *Times* of the previous month. Her eye ran down its columns and suddenly a paragraph flamed out.

“We are requested to state that the marriage arranged between Mr. Guy Dawnish, son of the late Colonel the Hon. Roderick Dawnish, of Malby, Wilts, and Gwendolen, daughter of Samuel Matcher, Esq., of Armingham Towers, Wilts, will not take place.”

Margaret dropped the paper and sat down, hiding her face against the stained baize of the desk. She remembered the photograph of the tennis-court at Guise—she remembered the handsome girl at whom Guy Dawnish looked up, laughing. A gust of tears shook her, loosening the dry surface of conventional feeling, welling up from unsuspected depths. She was sorry—very sorry, yet so glad—so ineffably, impenitently glad.

V

There came a reaction in which she decided to write to him. She even sketched out a letter of sisterly, almost motherly, remonstrance, in which she reminded him that he “still had all his life before him.” But she reflected that so, after all, had she; and that seemed to weaken the argument.

In the end she decided not to send the letter. He had never spoken to her of his engagement to Gwendolen Matcher, and his letters had contained no allusion to any sentimental disturbance in his life. She had only his few broken words, that night by the river, on which to build her theory of the case. But illuminated by the phrase “an unfortunate attachment” the theory towered up, distinct and immovable, like some high landmark by which travellers shape their

course. She had been loved—extraordinarily loved. But he had chosen that she should know of it by his silence rather than by his speech. He had understood that only on those terms could their transcendent communion continue—that he must lose her to keep her. To break that silence would be like spilling a cup of water in a waste of sand. There would be nothing left for her thirst.

Her life, thenceforward, was bathed in a tranquil beauty. The days flowed by like a river beneath the moon—each ripple caught the brightness and passed it on. She began to take a renewed interest in her familiar round of duties. The tasks which had once seemed colourless and irksome had now a kind of sacrificial sweetness, a symbolic meaning into which she alone was initiated. She had been restless—had longed to travel; now she felt that she should never again care to leave Wentworth. But if her desire to wander had ceased she travelled in spirit, performing invisible pilgrimages in the footsteps of her friend. She regretted that her one short visit to England had taken her so little out of London—that her acquaintance with the landscape had been formed chiefly through the windows of a railway carriage. She threw herself into the architectural studies of the Higher Thought Club, and distinguished herself, at the spring meetings, by her fluency, her competence, her inexhaustible curiosity on the subject of the growth of English Gothic. She ransacked the shelves of the college library, she borrowed photographs of the cathedrals, she pored over the folio pages of “The Seats of Noblemen and Gentlemen.” She was like some banished princess who learns that she has inherited a domain in her own country, who knows that she will never see it, yet feels, wherever she walks, its soil beneath her feet.

May was half over, and the Higher Thought Club was to hold its last meeting, previous to the college festivities which, in early June, agreeably disorganised the social routine of Wentworth. The meeting was to take place in Margaret Ransom’s drawing-room, and on the day before she sat upstairs preparing for her dual duties as hostess

and orator—for she had been invited to read the final paper of the course.

In order to sum up with precision her conclusions on the subject of English Gothic, she had been re-reading an analysis of the structural features of the principal English cathedrals; and she was murmuring over to herself the phrase: “The longitudinal arches of Lincoln have an approximately elliptical form” when there came a knock on the door, and Maria’s voice announced: “There’s a lady down in the parlour.”

Margaret’s soul dropped from the heights of the shadowy vaulting to the dead level of an afternoon call at Wentworth. “A lady? Did she give no name?”

Maria became confused. “She only said she was a lady—” and in reply to her mistress’s look of mild surprise: “Well, ma’am, she told me so three or four times over.”

Margaret laid her book down, leaving it open at the description of Lincoln, and slowly descended the stairs. As she did so, she repeated to herself: “The longitudinal arches are elliptical.”

On the threshold below, she had the odd impression that her bare inanimate drawing-room was brimming with life and noise—an impression produced, as she presently perceived, by the resolute forward dash—it was almost a pounce—of the one small figure restlessly measuring its length.

The dash checked itself within a yard of Margaret, and the lady—a stranger—held back long enough to stamp on her hostess a sharp impression of sallowness, leanness, keenness, before she said, in a voice that might have been addressing an unruly committee meeting: “I am Lady Caroline Duckett—a fact I found it impossible to make clear to the young woman who let me in.”

A warm wave rushed up from Margaret’s heart to her face. She held out both hands impulsively. “Oh, I’m so glad—I’d no idea—”

Her voice sank under her visitor’s impartial scrutiny.

“I don’t wonder,” said the latter dryly. “I suppose she didn’t

mention either that my object in calling here was to see Mrs. Ransom?"

"Oh, yes—won't you sit down?" Margaret pushed a chair forward. She seated herself at a little distance, brain and heart humming with a confused interchange of signals. This dark sharp woman was his aunt—the "clever aunt" who had had such a hard life, but had always managed to keep her head above water. Margaret remembered that Guy had spoken of her kindness—perhaps she would seem kinder when they had talked together a little. Meanwhile the first impression she produced was of an amplitude out of all proportion to her somewhat scant exterior. With her small flat figure, her shabby heterogeneous dress, she was as dowdy as any Professor's wife at Wentworth; but her dowdiness (Margaret borrowed a literary analogy to define it), her dowdiness was somehow "of the centre." Like the insignificant emissary of a great power, she was to be judged rather by her passports than her person.

While Margaret was receiving these impressions, Lady Caroline, with quick bird-like twists of her head, was gathering others from the pale void spaces of the drawing-room. Her eyes, divided by a sharp nose like a bill, seemed to be set far enough apart to see at separate angles; but suddenly she bent both of them on Margaret.

"This is Mrs. Ransom's house?" she asked, with an emphasis on the verb that gave a distinct hint of unfulfilled expectations.

Margaret assented.

"Because your American houses, especially in the provincial towns, all look so remarkably alike, that I thought I might have been mistaken; and as my time is extremely limited—in fact I'm sailing on Wednesday—"

She paused long enough to let Margaret say: "I had no idea you were in America."

Lady Caroline made no attempt to take this up.—"and so much of it," she carried on her sentence, "has been wasted in talking to people I really hadn't the slightest desire to see, that you must excuse

me if I go straight to the point.”

Margaret felt a sudden tension of the heart. “Of course,” she said, while a voice within her cried: “He’s dead—he has left me a message.”

There was another pause; then Lady Caroline went on with increasing asperity: “So that—in short—if I *could* see Mrs. Ransom at once—”

Margaret looked up in surprise. “I am Mrs. Ransom,” she said.

The other stared a moment, with much the same look of cautious incredulity that had marked her inspection of the drawing-room. Then light came to her.

“Oh, I beg your pardon. I should have said that I wished to see Mrs. *Robert* Ransom, not Mrs. Ransom. But I understood that in the States you don’t make those distinctions.” She paused a moment, and then went on, before Margaret could answer: “Perhaps, after all, it’s as well that I should see you instead, since you’re evidently one of the household—your son and his wife live with you, I suppose? Yes, on the whole, then, it’s better—I shall be able to talk so much more frankly.” She spoke as if, as a rule, circumstances prevented her giving rein to this prosperity. “And frankness, of course, is the only way out of this—this extremely tiresome complication. You know, I suppose, that my nephew thinks he’s in love with your daughter-in-law?”

Margaret made a slight movement, but her visitor pressed on without heeding it. “Oh, don’t fancy, please, that I’m pretending to take a high moral ground—though his mother does, poor dear! I can perfectly imagine that in a place like this—I’ve just been walking about it for two hours—a young man of Guy’s age would *have* to provide himself with some sort of distraction; and he’s not the kind to go in for anything objectionable. Oh, we quite allow for that—we should allow for the whole affair, if it hadn’t so preposterously ended in his throwing over the girl he was engaged to, and upsetting an arrangement that affected a number of people besides himself. I

understand that in the States it's different—the young people have only themselves to consider. In England—in our class, I mean—a great deal may depend on a young man's making a good match; and in Guy's case I may say that his mother and sisters (I won't include myself, though I might) have been simply stranded—thrown overboard—by his freak. You can understand how serious it is when I tell you that it's that and nothing else that has brought me all the way to America. And my first idea was to go straight to your daughter-in-law, since her influence is the only thing we can count on now, and put it to her fairly, as I'm putting it to you. But, on the whole, I dare say it's better to see you first—you might give me an idea of the line to take with her. I'm prepared to throw myself on her mercy!"

Margaret rose from her chair, outwardly rigid in proportion to her inward tremor.

"You don't understand—" she began.

Lady Caroline brushed the interruption aside. "Oh, but I do—completely! I cast no reflection on your daughter-in-law. Guy has made it quite clear to us that his attachment is—has, in short, not been rewarded. But don't you see that that's the worst part of it? There'd be much more hope of his recovering if Mrs. Robert Ransom had—had—"

Margaret's voice broke from her in a cry. "I am Mrs. Robert Ransom," she said.

If Lady Caroline Duckett had hitherto given her hostess the impression of a person not easily silenced, this fact added sensibly to the effect produced by the intense stillness which now fell on her.

She sat quite motionless, her large bangled hands clasped about the meagre fur boa she had unwound from her neck on entering, her rusty black veil pushed up to the edge of a "fringe" of doubtful authenticity, her thin lips parted on a gasp that seemed to sharpen itself on the edges of her teeth. So overwhelming and helpless was her silence that Margaret began to feel a motion of pity beneath her

indignation—a desire at least to facilitate the excuses which must terminate their disastrous colloquy. But when Lady Caroline found voice she did not use it to excuse herself.

“You *can’t* be,” she said, quite simply.

“Can’t be?” Margaret stammered, with a flushing cheek.

“I mean, it’s some mistake. Are there *two* Mrs. Robert Ransoms in the same town? Your family arrangements are so extremely puzzling.” She had a farther rush of enlightenment. “Oh, I *see!* I ought of course to have asked for Mrs. Robert Ransom *Junior!*”

The idea sent her to her feet with a haste which showed her impatience to make up for lost time.

“There is no other Mrs. Robert Ransom at Wentworth,” said Margaret.

“No other—no ‘Junior’? Are you *sure?*” Lady Caroline fell back into her seat again. “Then I simply don’t see,” she murmured.

Margaret’s blush had fixed itself on her throbbing forehead. She remained standing, while her strange visitor continued to gaze at her with a perturbation in which the consciousness of indiscretion had evidently as yet no part.

“I simply don’t see,” she repeated.

Suddenly she sprang up, and advancing to Margaret, laid an inspired hand on her arm. “But, my dear woman, you can help us out all the same; you can help us to find out *who it is* —and you will, won’t you? Because, as it’s not you, you can’t in the least mind what I’ve been saying—”

Margaret, freeing her arm from her visitor’s hold, drew back a step; but Lady Caroline instantly rejoined her.

“Of course, I can see that if it *had* been, you might have been annoyed: I dare say I put the case stupidly—but I’m so bewildered by this new development—by his using you all this time as a pretext—that I really don’t know where to turn for light on the mystery—”

She had Margaret in her imperious grasp again, but the latter broke from her with a more resolute gesture.

"I'm afraid I have no light to give you," she began; but once more Lady Caroline caught her up.

"Oh, but do please understand me! I condemn Guy most strongly for using your name—when we all know you'd been so amazingly kind to him! I haven't a word to say in his defence—but of course the important thing now is: *who is the woman, since you're not?*"

The question rang out loudly, as if all the pale puritan corners of the room flung it back with a shudder at the speaker. In the silence that ensued Margaret felt the blood ebbing back to her heart; then she said, in a distinct and level voice: "I know nothing of the history of Mr. Dawnish."

Lady Caroline gave a stare and a gasp. Her distracted hand groped for her boa, and she began to wind it mechanically about her long neck.

"It would really be an enormous help to us—and to poor Gwendolen Matcher," she persisted pleadingly. "And you'd be doing Guy himself a good turn."

Margaret remained silent and motionless while her visitor drew on one of the worn gloves she had pulled off to adjust her veil. Lady Caroline gave the veil a final twitch.

"I've come a tremendously long way," she said, "and, since it isn't you, I can't think why you won't help me. . . ."

When the door had closed on her visitor Margaret Ransom went slowly up the stairs to her room. As she dragged her feet from one step to another, she remembered how she had sprung up the same steep flight after that visit of Guy Dawnish's when she had looked in the glass and seen on her face the blush of youth.

When she reached her room she bolted the door as she had done that day, and again looked at herself in the narrow mirror above her dressing-table. It was just a year since then—the elms were budding again, the willows hanging their green veil above the bench by the river. But there was no trace of youth left in her face—she saw it

now as others had doubtless always seen it. If it seemed as it did to Lady Caroline Duckett, what look must it have worn to the fresh gaze of young Guy Dawnish?

A pretext—she had been a pretext. He had used her name to screen some one else—or perhaps merely to escape from a situation of which he was weary. She did not care to conjecture what his motive had been—everything connected with him had grown so remote and alien. She felt no anger—only an unspeakable sadness, a sadness which she knew would never be appeased.

She looked at herself long and steadily: she wished to clear her eyes of all illusions. Then she turned away and took her usual seat beside her work-table. From where she sat she could look down the empty elm-shaded street, up which, at this hour every day, she was sure to see her husband's figure advancing. She would see it presently—she would see it for many years to come. She had an aching vision of the length of the years that stretched before her. Strange that one who was not young should still, in all likelihood, have so long to live!

Nothing was changed in the setting of her life, perhaps nothing would ever change in it. She would certainly live and die in Wentworth. And meanwhile the days would go on as usual, bringing the usual obligations. As the word flitted through her brain she remembered that she had still to put the finishing touches to the paper she was to read the next afternoon at the meeting of the Higher Thought Club.

The book she had been reading lay face downward beside her, where she had left it an hour ago. She took it up, and slowly and painfully, like a child labouriously spelling out the syllables, she went on with the rest of the sentence:

—“and they spring from a level not much above that of the springing of the transverse and diagonal ribs, which are so arranged as to give a convex curve to the surface of the vaulting conoid.”

The Pot-Boiler

THE STUDIO faced north, looking out over a dismal reach of roofs and chimneys, and fire-escapes hung with heterogeneous garments. A crust of dirty snow covered the level surfaces, and a December sky with more snow in it lowered above them.

The room was bare and gaunt, with blotched walls and a stained uneven floor. On a divan lay a pile of “properties”—limp draperies, an Algerian scarf, a moth-eaten fan of peacock feathers. The janitor had forgotten to fill the coal-scuttle overnight, and the cast-iron stove projected its cold flanks into the room like a black iceberg. Ned Stanwell, who had just added his hat and great-coat to the heap on the divan, turned from the empty stove with a shiver.

“By Jove, this is a little too much like the last act of *Bohème*,” he said, slipping into his coat again after a vain glance at the coal-scuttle. Much solitude, and a lively habit of mind, had bred in him the habit of audible soliloquy, and having flung a shout for the janitor down the six flights dividing the studio from the basement, he turned back, picking up the thread of his monologue. “Exactly like *Bohème*, really—that crack in the wall is much more like a stage-crack than a real one—just the sort of crack Mungold would paint if he were doing a Humble Interior.”

Mungold, the fashionable portrait-painter of the hour, was the favourite object of the younger men’s irony.

“It only needs Kate Arran to be borne in dying,” Stanwell continued with a laugh. “Much more likely to be poor little Caspar, though,” he concluded.

His neighbour across the landing—the little sculptor Caspar Arran, humourously called “Gasper” on account of his bronchial asthma—had lately been joined by a sister, Kate Arran, a strapping girl, fresh from the country, who had installed herself in the little room off her brother’s studio, keeping house for him with a chafing-dish and a coffee-machine, to the mirth and envy of the other young men in the building.

Poor little Gasper had been very bad all the autumn, and it was surmised that his sister’s presence, which he spoke of growlingly, as a troublesome necessity imposed on him by the death of an aunt, was really a sign of his failing ability to take care of himself. Kate Arran took his complaints with unfailing good humour, darned his socks, brushed his clothes, fed him with steaming broths and foaming milk-punches, and listened with reverential assent to his interminable disquisitions on art. Every one in the house was sorry for little Gasper, and the other fellows liked him all the more because it was so impossible to like his sculpture; but his talk was a bore, and when his colleagues ran in to see him they were apt to keep a hand on the door-knob and to plead a pressing engagement. At least they had been till Kate came; but now they began to show a disposition to enter and sit down. Caspar, who was no fool, perceived the change, and perhaps detected its cause; at any rate he showed no special gratification at the increased cordiality of his friends, and Kate, who followed him in everything, took this as a sign that guests were to be discouraged.

There was one exception, however: Ned Stanwell, who was deplorably good-natured, had always lent a patient ear to Caspar, and he now reaped his reward by being taken into Kate’s favour. Before she had been a month in the building they were on confidential terms as to Caspar’s health, and lately Stanwell had penetrated farther, even to the inmost recesses of her anxiety about her brother’s career. Caspar had recently had a bad blow in the refusal of his *magnum opus*—a vast allegorical group—by the

Commissioners of the Minneapolis Exhibition. He took the rejection with Promethean irony, proclaimed it as the clinching proof of his genius, and abounded in reasons why, even in an age of such crass artistic ignorance, a refusal so egregious must react to the advantage of its object. But his sister's indignation, if as glowing, was a shade less hopeful. Of course Caspar was going to succeed—she knew it was only a question of time—but she paled at the word and turned imploring eyes on Stanwell. *Was there time enough?* It was the one element in the combination that she could not count on; and Stanwell, reddening under her look, and cursing his own glaring robustness, would affirm that of course, of course, of course, by everything that was holy there was time enough—with the mental reservation that there wouldn't be, even if poor Caspar lived to be a hundred.

"Vos dat you yelling for the shanitor, Mr. Sdanwell?" inquired an affable voice through the doorway; and Stanwell, turning with a laugh, confronted the squat figure of a middle-aged man in an expensive fur coat, who looked as if his face secreted the oil which he used on his hair.

"Hullo, Shepson—I should say I *was* yelling. Did you ever feel such cold? That fool has forgotten to light the stove. Come in, but for heaven's sake don't take off your coat."

Mr. Shepson glanced about the studio with a look which seemed to say that, where so much else was lacking, the absence of a fire hardly added to the general sense of destitution.

"Vell, you ain't as vell fixed as Mr. Mungold—ever been to his studio, Mr. Sdanwell? De most *exquisite* blush hangings, and a gas-fire, shoost as natural—"

"Oh, hang it, Shepson, do you call *that* a studio? It's like a manicure's parlour—or a beauty-doctor's. By George," broke off Stanwell, "and that's just what he is!"

"A peauty-doctor?"

"Yes—oh, well, you wouldn't see," murmured Stanwell, mentally

storing his epigram for more appreciative ears. "But you didn't come just to make me envious of Mungold's studio, did you?" And he pushed forward a chair for his visitor.

The latter, however, declined it with a friendly motion. "Of gourse not, of gourse not—but Mr. Mungold is a sensible man. He makes a lot of money, you know."

"Is that what you came to tell me?" said Stanwell, still humourously.

"My gootness, no—I was downstairs looking at Holbrook's sdained class, and I shoost thought I'd sdep up a minute and take a beep at your vork."

"Much obliged, I'm sure—especially as I assume that you don't want any of it." Try as he would, Stanwell could not keep a note of eagerness from his voice. Mr. Shepson caught the note, and eyed him shrewdly through gold-rimmed glasses.

"Vell, vell, vell—I'm not prepared to commit myself. Shoost let me take a look round, vill you?"

"With the greatest pleasure—and I'll give another shout for the coal."

Stanwell went out on the landing, and Mr. Shepson, left to himself, began a meditative progress about the room. On an easel facing the improvised dais stood a canvas on which a young woman's head had been blocked in. It was just in that state of semi-evocation when a picture seems to detach itself from the grossness of its medium and live a wondrous moment in the actual; and the quality of the head—a vigorous dusky youthfulness, a kind of virgin majesty—lent itself to this illusion of life. Stanwell, who had re-entered the studio, could not help drawing a sharp breath as he saw the picture-dealer pausing with tilted head before this portrait: it seemed, at one moment, so impossible that he should not be struck with it, at the next so incredible that he should be.

Shepson cocked his parrot-eye at the canvas with a desultory "Vat's dat?" which sent a twinge through the young man.

"That? Oh—a sketch of a young lady," stammered Stanwell, Rushing at the imbecility of his reply. "It's Miss Arran, you know," he added, "the sister of my neighbour here, the sculptor."

"Sculpture? There's no market for modern sculpture except dombstones," said Shepson disparagingly, passing on as if he included the sister's portrait in his condemnation of her brother's trade.

Stanwell smiled, but more at himself than Shepson. How could he have supposed that the gross fool would see anything in his sketch of Kate Arran? He stood aside, straining after detachment, while the dealer continued his round of exploration, waddling up to the canvases on the walls, prodding with his stick at those stacked in corners, prying and peering sideways like a great bird rummaging for seed. He seemed to find little nutriment in the course of his search, for the sounds he emitted expressed a weary distaste for misdirected effort, and he completed his round without having thought it worth while to draw a single canvas from its obscurity.

As his visits always had the same result, Stanwell was reduced to wondering why he had come again; but Shepson was not the man to indulge in vague roamings through the field of art, and it was safe to conclude that his purpose would in due course reveal itself. His tour brought him at length face to face with the painter, where he paused, clasping his plump gloved hands behind him, and shaking an admonitory head.

"Gleffer—very gleffer, of course—I suppose you'll let me know when you want to sell anything?"

"Let you know?" gasped Stanwell, to whom the room grew so suddenly hot that he thought for a moment the janitor must have made up the fire.

Shepson gave a dry laugh. "Vell, it doesn't sdrake me that you want to now—doing this kind of thing, you know!" And he swept a disparaging hand about the studio.

"Ah," said Stanwell, who could not keep a note of flatness out of

his laugh.

“See here, Mr. Sdanwell, vot you do it for? If you do it for yourself and the other fellows, vell and good—only don’t ask me round. I sell pictures, I don’t theorize about them. Ven you vant to sell, gome to me with what my gustomers vant. You can do it—you’re smart enough. You can do most anything. Vere’s dat bortrait of Gladys Glyde dat you showed at the Fake Club last autumn? Dat little thing in de Romney style? Dat vas a little shem, now,” exclaimed Mr. Shepson, whose pronunciation grew increasingly Semitic in moments of excitement.

Stanwell stared. Called on a few months previously to contribute to an exhibition of skits on well-known artists, he had used the photograph of a favourite music-hall “star” as the basis of a picture in the pseudo-historical style affected by the fashionable portrait-painters of the day.

“That thing?” he said contemptuously. “How on earth did you happen to see it?”

“I see everything,” returned the dealer with an oracular smile. “If you’ve got it here let me look at it, please.”

It cost Stanwell a few minutes’ search to unearth his skit—a clever blending of dash and sentimentality, in just the right proportion to create the impression of a powerful brush subdued to mildness by the charms of the sitter. Stanwell had thrown it off in a burst of imitative frenzy, beginning for the mere joy of the satire, but gradually fascinated by the problem of producing the requisite mingling of attributes. He was surprised now to see how well he had mixed the brew, and Shepson’s face reflected his approval.

“By George! Dat’s something like,” the dealer ejaculated.

“Like what? Like Mungold?”

“Like business! Like a big order for a bortrait, Mr. Sdanwell—dat’s what it’s like!” cried Shepson, swinging round on him. Stanwell’s stare widened. “An order for me?”

“Vy not? Accidents *vill* happen,” said Shepson jocosely. “De fact is,

Mrs. Archer Millington wants to be bainted—you know her sdyle? Well, she prides herself on her likeness to little Gladys. And so ven she saw dat bicture of yours at de Fake Show she made a note of your name, and de udder day she sent for me and she says: ‘Mr. Shepson, I’m tired of Mungold—all my friends are done by Mungold. I vant to break away and be orishinal—I vant to be done by the bainter that did Gladys Glyde.’ ”

Shepson waited to observe the result of this overwhelming announcement, and Stanwell, after a momentary halt of surprise, brought out laughingly: “But this is a Mungold. Is that what she calls being original?”

“Shoost exactly,” said Shepson with unexpected acuteness. “That’s vat dey all want—something different from vat all deir friends have got, but shoost like it all de same. Dat’s de public all over! Mrs. Millington don’t want a Mungold, because everybody’s got a Mungold, but she wants a picture that’s in the same sdyle, because dat’s de sdyle, and she’s afraid of any oder!”

Stanwell was listening with real enjoyment. “Ah, you know your public,” he murmured.

“Vell, you do too, or you couldn’t have painted dat,” the dealer retorted. “And I don’t say dey’re wrong—mind dat. I like a bretty picture myself. And I understand the way dey feel. Dey’re villing to let Sargent take liberties vid them, because it’s like being punched in de ribs by a King; but if anybody else baints them, they vant to look as sweet as an obituary.” He turned earnestly to Stanwell. “The thing is to attract their notice. Vonce you got it they von’t gif you dime to sleep. And dat’s why I’m here to-day—you’ve attracted Mrs. Millington’s notice, and vonce you’re hung in dat new ball-room—dat’s vere she vants you, in a big gold panel—vonce you’re dere, vy, you’ll be like the Pianola—no home gомpleat without you. And I ain’t going to charge you any commission on the first job!”

He stood before the painter, exuding a mixture of deference and patronage in which either element might prevail as events

developed; but Stanwell could see in the incident only the stuff for a good story.

“My dear Shepson,” he said, “what are you talking about? This is no picture of mine. Why don’t you ask me to do you a Corot? I hear there’s a great demand for them still in the West. Or an Arthur Schracker—I can do Schracker as well as Mungold,” he added, turning around a small canvas at which a paint-pot seemed to have been hurled with violence from a considerable distance.

Shepson ignored the allusion to Corot, but screwed his eyes at the picture. “Ah, Schracker—vell, the Schracker sdyle would take first rate if you were a foreigner—but for goodness sake don’t try it on Mrs. Millington!”

Stanwell pushed the two skits aside. “Oh, you can trust me,” he cried humorously. “The pearls and the eyes very large—the hands and feet very small. Isn’t that about the size of it?”

“Dat’s it—dat’s it. And the cheque as big as you vant to make it! Mrs. Millington vants the picture finished in time for her first barty in the new ball-room, and if you rush the job she won’t sdickle at an extra thousand. Vill you come along with me now and arrange for your first zitting?”

He stood before the young man, urgent, paternal, and so imbued with the importance of his mission that his face stretched to a ludicrous length of dismay when Stanwell, giving him a good-humoured push, cried gaily: “My dear fellow, it will make my price rise still higher when the lady hears I’m too busy to take any orders at present—and that I’m actually obliged to turn you out now because I’m expecting a sitter!”

It was part of Shepson’s business to have a quick ear for the note of finality, and he offered no resistance to Stanwell’s push; but on the threshold he paused to murmur, with a regretful glance at the denuded studio: “You could haf done it, Mr. Sdanwell—you could haf done it!”

Kate Arran was Stanwell's sitter; but the janitor had hardly filled the stove when she came in to say she could not sit. Caspar had had a bad night; he was depressed and feverish, and in spite of his protests she had resolved to fetch the doctor. Care sat on her usually tranquil features, and Stanwell, as he offered to go for the doctor, wished he could have caught in his picture the wide gloom of her brow. There was always a kind of Biblical breadth in the expression of her emotions, and to-day she suggested a text from Isaiah.

"But you're not busy?" she hesitated, in the full voice which seemed tuned to a solemn rhetoric.

"I meant to be—with you. But since that's off I'm quite unemployed."

She smiled interrogatively. "I thought perhaps you had an order. I met Mr. Shepson rubbing his hands on the landing."

"Was he rubbing his hands? Well, it was not over me. He says that from the style of my pictures he doesn't suppose I want to sell."

She looked at him superbly. "Well, do you?"

He embraced his bleak walls in a circular gesture. "Judge for yourself!"

"Ah, but it's splendidly furnished!"

"With rejected pictures, you mean?"

"With ideals!" she exclaimed, in a tone caught from her brother, and which would have been irritating to Stanwell if it had not been moving.

He gave a slight shrug and took up his hat; but she interposed to say that if it didn't make any difference she would prefer to have him go and sit with poor Caspar, while she ran for the doctor and did some household errands by the way. Stanwell divined in her request the need of a brief respite from Caspar, and though he shivered at the thought of her facing the cold in the scant jacket which had been her only wear since he had known her, he let her go without protest, and betook himself to Arran's studio.

He found the little sculptor dressed and roaming fretfully about the melancholy room in which he and his plastic offspring lodged. In one corner, where Kate's chair and work-table stood, a scrupulous order prevailed; but the rest of the apartment had the dreary untidiness, the damp gray look, which the worker in clay usually creates about him. In the centre of this desert stood the shrouded image of Caspar's disappointment: the colossal rejected group as to which his friends could seldom remember whether it represented Jove hurling a Titan from Olympus or Science Subjugating Religion. Caspar was the sworn foe of religion, which he appeared to regard as indirectly connected with his inability to sell his statues.

The sculptor was too ill to work, and Stanwell's appearance loosed the pent-up springs of his talk.

"Hallo! What are you doing here? I thought Kate had gone over to sit to you. She wanted a little fresh air? I should say enough of it came in through these windows. How like a woman, when she's agreed to do a certain thing, to make up her mind at once that she's got to do another! They don't call it caprice—it's always duty; that's the humour of it. I'll be bound Kate alleged a pressing engagement. Sorry she should waste your time so, my dear fellow. Here am I with plenty of it to burn—look at my hand shake; I can't do a thing! Well, luckily nobody wants me to—posterity may suffer, but the present generation isn't worrying. The present generation wants to be carved in sugar-candy, or painted in maple syrup. It doesn't want to be told the truth about itself or about anything in the universe. The prophets have always lived in a garret, my dear fellow—only the ravens don't always find out their address! Speaking of ravens, though, Kate told me she saw old Shepson coming out of your place—I say, old man, you're not meditating an apostasy? You're not doing the kind of thing that Shepson would look at?"

Stanwell laughed. "He looked at them—but only to confirm his reasons for rejecting them."

"Ha! ha! That's right—he wanted to refresh his memory with their

badness. But how on earth did he happen to have any doubts on the subject? I should as soon have thought of his coming in here!”

Stanwell winced at the comparison, but replied in Caspar’s key: “Oh, he’s not as sure of any of us as he is of you!”

The sculptor received this tribute with a joyous expletive. “By God, no, he’s sure of me, as you say! He and his tribe know that I’ll starve in my tracks sooner than make a concession—a single concession. A fellow came after me once to do an angel on a tombstone—an angel leaning against a broken column, and looking as if it was waiting for the elevator and wondering why in hell it didn’t come. He said he wanted me to show that the deceased was pining to get to heaven. As she was his wife I didn’t dispute the proposition, but when I asked him what he understood by *heaven* he grabbed his hat and walked out of the studio. *He* didn’t wait for the elevator.”

Stanwell listened with a practised smile. The story of the man who had come to order the angel was so familiar to Arran’s friends that its only interest consisted in waiting to see what variation he would give to the retort which had put the mourner to flight. It was generally supposed that this visit represented the sculptor’s nearest approach to an order, and one of his fellow-craftsmen had been heard to remark that if Caspar *had* made the tombstone, the lady under it would have tried harder than ever to get to heaven. To Stanwell’s present mood, however, there was something more than usually irritating in the gratuitous assumption that Arran had only to descend from his altitude to have a press of purchasers at his door.

“Well—what did you gain by kicking your widower out?” he objected. “Why can’t a man do two kinds of work—one to please himself and the other to boil the pot?”

Caspar stopped in his jerky walk—the stride of a tall man attempted with short legs (it sometimes appeared to Stanwell to symbolize his artistic endeavour).

“Why can’t a man—why can’t he? You ask me that, Stanwell?” he blazed out.

“Yes; and what’s more, I’ll answer you: it isn’t everybody who can adapt his art as he wants to!”

Caspar stood before him, gasping with incredulous scorn. “Adapt his art? As he wants to? Unhappy wretch, what lingo are you talking? If you mean that it isn’t every honest man who can be a renegade—”

“That’s just what I do mean: he can’t unless he’s clever enough to see the other side.”

The deep groan with which Caspar met this casuistry was cut short by a knock at the studio door, which thereupon opened to admit a small dapperly-dressed man with a silky moustache and mildly-bulging eyes.

“Ah, Mungold,” exclaimed Stanwell, to cover the gloomy silence with which Arran received the newcomer; whereat the latter, with the air of a man who does not easily believe himself unwelcome, bestowed a sympathetic pressure on the sculptor’s hand.

“My dear chap, I’ve just met Miss Arran, and she told me you were laid up with a bad cold, so I thought I’d pop in and cheer you up.”

He looked about him with a smile evidently intended as the first act in his beneficent programme.

Mr. Mungold, freshly soaped and scented, with a neat glaze of gentility extending from his varnished boot-tips to his glossy hat, looked like the “flattered” portrait of a common man—just such an idealized presentment as his own brush might have produced. As a rule, however, he devoted himself to the portrayal of the other sex, painting ladies in syrup, as Arran said, with marsh-mallow children against their knees. He was as quick as a dressmaker at catching new ideas, and the style of his pictures changed as rapidly as that of the fashion-plates. One year all his sitters were done on oval canvases, with gauzy draperies and a back-ground of clouds; the next they were seated under an immemorial elm, caressing enormous dogs obviously constructed out of door-mats. Whatever their occupation they always looked straight out of the canvas, giving the impression

that their eyes were fixed on an invisible camera. This gave rise to the rumour that Mungold “did” his portraits from photographs; it was even said that he had invented a way of transferring an enlarged photograph to the canvas, so that all that remained was to fill in the colours. If he heard of this charge he took it calmly, but probably it had not reached the high spheres in which he moved, and in which he was esteemed for painting pearls better, and making unsuggestive children look lovelier, than any of his fellow-craftsmen. Mr. Mungold, in fact, deemed it a part of his professional duty to study his sitters in their home-life; and as this life was chiefly led in the homes of others, he was too busy dining out and going to the opera to mingle much with his colleagues. But as no one is wholly consistent, Mr. Mungold had lately belied his ambitions by falling in love with Kate Arran; and with that gentle persistency which made him so wonderful in managing obstreperous infantile sitters, he had contrived to establish a footing in her brother’s studio.

Part of his success was due to the fact that he could not easily think himself the object of a rebuff. If it seemed to hit him he regarded it as deflected from its aim, and brushed it aside with a discreet gesture. A touch of comedy was lent to the situation by the fact that, till Kate Arran’s coming, Mungold had always served as her brother’s Awful Example. It was a mark of Arran’s lack of humour that he persisted in regarding the little man as a conscious apostate, instead of perceiving that he painted as he could, in a world which really looked to him like a vast confectioner’s window. Stanwell had never quite divined how Mungold had won over the sister, to whom her brother’s prejudices were a religion; but he suspected the painter of having united a deep belief in Caspar’s genius with the occasional offer of opportune delicacies—the port-wine or game which Kate had no other means of procuring for the patient.

Stanwell, persuaded that Mungold would stick to his post till Miss Arran’s return, felt himself freed from his promise to the latter and left the incongruous pair to themselves. There had been a time when

it amused him to see Caspar submerge the painter in a torrent of denunciatory eloquence, and to watch poor Mungold sputtering under its rush, yet emitting little bland phrases of assent, like a gentleman drowning correctly, in gloves and eye-glasses. But Stanwell was beginning to find less food for gaiety than for envy in the contemplation of his colleague. After all, Mungold held his ground, he did not go under. Spite of his manifest absurdity he had succeeded in propitiating the sister, in making himself tolerated by the brother; and the fact that his success was due to the ability to purchase port-wine and game was not in this case a mitigating circumstance. Stanwell knew that the Arrans really preferred him to Mungold, but the knowledge only sharpened his envy of the latter, whose friendship could command visible tokens of expression, while poor Stanwell's remained gloomily inarticulate. As he returned to his overpopulated studio and surveyed anew the pictures of which Shepson had not offered to relieve him, he found himself wishing, not for Mungold's lack of scruples, for he believed him to be the most scrupulous of men, but for that happy mean of talent which so completely satisfied the artistic requirements of the inartistic. Mungold was not to be despised as an apostate—he was to be congratulated as a man whose aptitudes were exactly in line with the taste of the persons he liked to dine with.

At this point in his meditations, Stanwell's eye fell on the portrait of Miss Gladys Glyde. It was really, as Shepson said, as good as a Mungold; yet it could never be made to serve the same purpose, because it was the work of a man who knew it was bad art. That at least would have been Caspar Arran's contention—poor Caspar, who produced as bad art in the service of the loftiest convictions! The distinction began to look like mere casuistry to Stanwell. He had never been very proud of his own adaptability. It had seemed to him to indicate the lack of an individual standpoint, and he had tried to counteract it by the cultivation of an aggressively personal style. But the cursed knack was in his fingers—he was always at the mercy of

some other man's sensations, and there were moments when he blushed to remember that his grandfather had spent a laborious lifetime in Rome, copying the Old Masters for a generation which lacked the resource of the camera. Now, however, it struck him that the ancestral versatility might be a useful inheritance. In art, after all, the greatest of them did what they could; and if a man could do several things instead of one, why should he not profit by his multiplicity of gifts? If one had two talents why not serve two masters?

III

Stanwell, while seeing Caspar through the attack which had been the cause of his sister's arrival, had struck up a friendship with the young doctor who climbed the patient's six flights with unremitting fidelity. The two, since then, had continued to exchange confidences regarding the sculptor's health, and Stanwell, anxious to waylay the doctor after his visit, left the studio door ajar, and went out when he heard a sound of leave-taking across the landing. But it appeared that the doctor had just come, and that it was Mungold who was making his adieux.

The latter at once assumed that Stanwell had been on the alert for him, and met the supposed advance by inviting himself into the studio.

"May I come and take a look around, my dear fellow? I've been meaning to drop in for an age—" Mungold always spoke with a girlish emphasis and effusiveness— "but I have been so busy getting up Mrs. Van Orley's tableaux—English eighteenth century portraits, you know—that really, what with that and my sittings, I've hardly had time to think. And then you know you owe me about a dozen visits! But you're a savage—you don't pay visits. You stay here and *piocher*—which is wiser, as the results prove. Ah, you're strong—immensely strong!" He paused in the middle of the studio, glancing about a little apprehensively, as though he thought the stored energy

of the pictures might result in an explosion. "Very original—very striking—ah, Miss Arran! A powerful head; but—excuse the suggestion—isn't there just the least little lack of sweetness? You don't think she has the sweet type? Perhaps not—but could she be so lovely if she were not intensely feminine? Just at present, though, she's not looking her best—she is horribly tired. I'm afraid there is very little money left—and poor dear Caspar is so impossible: he won't hear of a loan. Otherwise I should be most happy—. But I came just now to propose a piece of work—in fact to give an order. Mrs. Archer Millington has built a new ball-room, as I daresay you may have seen in the papers, and she's been kind enough to ask me for some hints—oh, merely as a friend: I don't presume to do more than advise. But her decorator wants to do something with Cupids—something light and playful. And so I ventured to say that I knew a very clever sculptor—well, I *do* believe Caspar has talent—latent talent, you know—and at any rate a job of that sort would be a big lift for him. At least I thought he would regard it so; but you should have heard him when I showed him the decorator's sketch. He asked me what the Cupids were to be done in—lard? And if I thought he had had his training at a confectioner's? And I don't know what more besides—but he worked himself up to such a degree that he brought on a frightful fit of coughing, and Miss Arran, I'm afraid, was rather annoyed with me when she came in, though I'm sure an order from Mrs. Archer Millington is not a thing that would annoy most people!"

Mr. Mungold paused, breathless with the rehearsal of his wrongs, and Stanwell said with a smile: "You know poor Caspar's terribly stiff on the purity of the artist's aim."

"The artist's aim?" Mr. Mungold stared. "What is the artist's aim but to please—isn't that the purpose of all true art? But his theories are so extravagant. I really don't know what I shall say to Mrs. Millington—she's not used to being refused. I suppose I'd better put it on the ground of ill-health." The artist glanced at his handsome repeater. "Dear me, I promised to be at Mrs. Van Orley's before

twelve. We're to settle about the curtain before luncheon. My dear fellow, it's been a privilege to see your work. By the way, *you* have never done any modelling, I suppose? You're so extraordinarily versatile—I didn't know whether you might care to undertake the Cupids yourself."

Stanwell had to wait a long time for the doctor; and when the latter came out he looked grave. Worse? No, he couldn't say that Caspar was worse—but then he wasn't better. There was nothing mortal the matter, but the question was how long he could hold out. It was the kind of case where there is no use in drugs—he had merely scribbled a prescription to quiet Miss Arran.

"It's the cold, I suppose," Stanwell groaned. "He ought to be shipped off to Florida."

The doctor made a negative gesture. "Florida be hanged! What he wants is to sell his group. That would set him up quicker than sitting on the equator."

"Sell his group?" Stanwell echoed. "But he's so indifferent to recognition—he believes in himself so thoroughly. I thought at first he would be hard hit when the Exhibition Committee refused it, but he seems to regard that as another proof of its superiority."

His visitor turned on him the keen eye of the confessor. "Indifferent to recognition? He's eating his heart out for it. Can't you see that all that talk is just so much whistling to keep his courage up? The name of his disease is failure—and I can't write the prescription that will cure that. But if somebody would come along and take a fancy to those two naked parties who are breaking each other's heads we'd have Mr. Caspar putting on a pound a day."

The truth of this diagnosis became suddenly vivid to Stanwell. How dull of him not to have seen before that it was not cold or privation which was killing Caspar—not anxiety for his sister's future, nor the ache of watching her daily struggle—but simply the cankering thought that he might die before he had made himself

known! It was his vanity that was starving to death, and all Mungold's hampers could not appease that hunger. Stanwell was not shocked by the discovery—he was only the more sorry for the little man, who was, after all, denied that solace of self-sufficiency which his talk so noisily proclaimed. His lot seemed hard enough when Stanwell had pictured him as buoyed up by the scorn of public opinion—it became tragic if he was denied that support. The artist wondered if Kate had guessed her brother's secret, or if she were still the dupe of his stoicism. Stanwell was sure that the sculptor would take no one into his confidence, and least of all his sister, whose faith in his artistic independence was the chief prop of that tottering pose. Kate's penetration was not great, and Stanwell recalled the incredulous smile with which she had heard him defend poor Mungold's "sincerity" against Caspar's assaults; but she had the insight of the heart, and where her brother's happiness was concerned she might have seen deeper than any of them. It was this last consideration which took the strongest hold on Stanwell—he felt Caspar's sufferings chiefly through the thought of his sister's possible disillusionment.

IV

Within three months two events had set the studio building talking. Stanwell had painted a full-length portrait of Mrs. Archer Millington, and Caspar Arran had received an order to execute his group in marble.

The name of the sculptor's patron had not been divulged. The order came through Shepson, who explained that an American customer living abroad, having seen a photograph of the group in one of the papers, had at once cabled home to secure it. He intended to bestow it on a public building in America, and not wishing to advertise his munificence, had preferred that even the sculptor should remain ignorant of his name. The group bought by an enlightened compatriot for the adornment of a civic building in his

native land! There could hardly be a more complete vindication of unappreciated genius, and Caspar made the most of the argument. He was not exultant, he was sublimely magnanimous. He had always said that he could afford to await the Verdict of Posterity, and his unknown patron's act clearly shadowed forth that impressive decision. Happily it also found expression in a cheque which it would have taken more philosophy to await. The group was paid for in advance, and Kate's joy in her brother's recognition was deliciously mingled with the thrill of ordering him some new clothes, and coaxing him out to dine succulently at a neighbouring restaurant. Caspar flourished insufferably on this régime: he began to strike the attitude of the Great Master, who gives advice and encouragement to the struggling neophyte. He held himself up as an example of the reward of disinterestedness, of the triumph of the artist who clings doggedly to his ideals.

"A man must believe in his star—look at Napoleon! It's the trust in one's convictions that tells—it always ends by forcing the public into line. Only be sure you make no concessions—don't give in to any of their humbug! An artist who listens to the critics is ruined—they never have any use for the poor devils who do what they're told. Run after fame and she'll keep you running, but stay in your own corner and do your own work, and by George sir, she'll come crawling up on her hands and knees and ask to have her likeness done!"

These exhortations were chiefly directed to Stanwell, partly because the inmates of the other studios were apt to elude them, partly also because the rumours concerning Stanwell's portrait of Mrs. Millington had begun to disquiet the sculptor. At first he had taken a condescending interest in the fact of his friend's receiving an order, and had admonished him not to lose the chance of "showing up" his sitter and her environment. It was a splendid opportunity for a fellow with a "message" to be introduced into the tents of the Philistine, and Stanwell was charged to drive a long sharp nail into the enemy's skull. But presently Arran began to suspect that the

portrait was not as comminatory as he could have wished. Mungold, the most kindly of rivals, let drop a word of injudicious praise: the picture, he said, promised to be delightfully “in keeping” with the decorations of the ball-room, and the lady’s gown harmonised exquisitely with the window-curtains. Stanwell, called to account by his monitor, reminded the latter that he himself had been selected by Mungold to do the Cupids for Mrs. Millington’s ball-room, and that the friendly artist’s praise could, therefore, not be taken as positive evidence of incapacity.

“Ah, but I didn’t do them—I kicked him out!” Caspar rejoined; and Stanwell could only plead that, even in the cause of art, one could hardly kick a lady.

“Ah, that’s the worst of it. If the women get at you you’re lost. You’re young, you’re impressionable, you won’t mind my saying that you’re not built for a Stoic, and hang it, they’ll coddle you, they’ll enervate you, they’ll sentimentalise you, they’ll make a Mungold of you!”

“Poor Mungold,” Stanwell laughed. “If he lived the life of an anchorite he couldn’t help painting pictures that would please Mrs. Millington.”

“Whereas you could,” Kate interjected, raising her head from the ironing-board where, Sphinx-like, magnificent, she swung a splendid arm above her brother’s shirts.

“Oh, well, perhaps I shan’t please her; perhaps I shall elevate her taste.”

Caspar directed a groan to his sister. “That’s what they all think at first—Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came. But inside the Dark Tower there’s the Venusberg. Oh, I don’t mean that you’ll be taken with truffles and plush footmen, like Mungold. But praise, my poor Ned—praise is a deadly drug! It’s the absinthe of the artist—and they’ll stupefy you with it. You’ll wallow in the mire of success.”

Stanwell raised a protesting hand. “Really, for one order you’re a little lurid!”

“One? Haven’t you already had a dozen others?”

“Only one other, so far—and I’m not sure I shall do that.”

“Not sure—wavering already! That’s the way the mischief begins. If the women get a fad for you they’ll work you like a galley-slave. You’ll have to do your round of ‘copy’ every morning. What becomes of inspiration then? How are you going to loaf and invite the soul? Don’t barter your birthright for a mess of pottage! Oh, I understand the temptation—I know the taste of money and success. But look at me, Stanwell. You know how long I had to wait for recognition. Well, now it’s come to me I don’t mean to let it knock me off my feet. I don’t mean to let myself be overworked; I’ve already made it known that I will not be bullied into taking more orders than I can do full justice to. And my sister is with me, God bless her; Kate would rather go on ironing my shirts in a garret than see me prostitute my art!”

Kate’s radiant glance confirmed this declaration of independence, and Stanwell, with his evasive laugh, asked her if, meanwhile, she should object to his investing a part of his ill-gotten gains in theatre tickets for the party that evening.

It appeared that Stanwell had also been paid in advance, and well paid; for he began to permit himself various mild distractions, in which he generally contrived to have the Arrans share. It seemed perfectly natural to Kate that Caspar’s friends should spend their money for his recreation, and by one of the most touching sophistries of her sex she thus reconciled herself to taking a little pleasure on her own account. Mungold was less often in the way, for she had never been able to forgive him for proposing that Caspar should do Mrs. Millington’s Cupids; and for a few happy weeks Stanwell had the undisputed enjoyment of her pride in her brother’s achievement.

Stanwell had “rushed” through Mrs. Millington’s portrait in time for the opening of her new ball-room; and it was perhaps in return for this favour that she consented to let the picture be exhibited at a big Portrait Show which was held in April for the benefit of a fashionable charity.

In Mrs. Millington's ball-room the picture had been seen and approved only by the distinguished few who had access to that social sanctuary; but on the walls of the exhibition it became a centre of comment and discussion. One of the immediate results of this publicity was a visit from Shepson, with two or three orders in his pocket, as he put it. He surveyed the studio with fresh disgust, asked Stanwell why he did not move, and was impressed rather than downcast on learning that the painter had not decided whether he would take any more orders that spring.

"You might haf a studio at Newport," he suggested. "It would be rather new to do your sitters out of doors, with the sea behind them—showing they had a blace on the gliffs!"

The picture produced a different and less flattering effect on the critics. They gave it, indeed, more space than they had ever before accorded to the artist's efforts, but their estimate seemed to confirm Caspar Arran's forebodings, and Stanwell had perhaps never despised them so little as when he read their comments on his work. On the whole, however, neither praise nor blame disquieted him. He was engrossed in the contemplation of Kate Arran's happiness, and basking in the refracted warmth it shed about her. The doctor's prognostications had come true. Caspar was putting on a pound a week, and had plunged into a fresh "creation" more symbolic and encumbering than the monument of which he had been so opportunely relieved. If there was any cloud on Stanwell's enjoyment of life, it was caused by the discovery that success had quadrupled Caspar's artistic energies. Meanwhile it was delightful to see Kate's joy in her brother's recovered capacity for work, and to listen to the axioms which, for Stanwell's guidance, she deduced from the example of Caspar's heroic devotion to the ideal. There was nothing repellent in Kate's borrowed didacticism. If it sometimes bored Stanwell to hear her quote her brother, he was sure it would never bore him to be quoted by her himself; and there were moments when he felt he had nearly achieved that distinction.

Caspar was not addicted to the visiting of art exhibitions. He took little interest in any productions save his own, and was disposed to believe that good pictures, like clever criminals, are apt to go unhung. Stanwell therefore thought it unlikely that his portrait of Mrs. Millington would be seen by Kate, who was not given to independent explorations in the field of art; but one day, on entering the exhibition—which he had hitherto rather nervously shunned—he saw the Arrans at the end of the gallery in which the portrait hung. They were not looking at it, they were moving away from it, and to Stanwell's quickened perceptions their movement was almost that of flight. For a moment he thought of flying too; then a desperate resolve nerved him to meet them, and stemming the crowd he made a circuit which brought him face to face with their retreat.

The room in which they met was nearly empty, and there was nothing to intervene between the shock of their interchanged glances. Caspar was flushed and bristling: his little body quivered like a machine from which the steam has just been turned off. Kate lifted a stricken glance. Stanwell read in it the reflection of her brother's tirade, but she held out her hand in silence.

For a moment Caspar was silent too; then, with a terrible smile: "My dear fellow, I congratulate you: Mungold will have to look to his laurels," he said.

The shot delivered, he stalked away with his seven-league stride, and Kate followed sadly in his wake.

V

Shepson took up his hat with a despairing gesture. "Vell, I gif you up—I gif you up!"

"Don't—yet," protested Stanwell from the divan.

It was winter again, and though the janitor had not forgotten the fire, the studio gave no other evidence of its master's increasing prosperity. If Stanwell spent his money it was not on himself.

He leaned back against the wall, his hands in his pockets, a

cigarette between his lips, while Shepson paced the dirty floor or halted impatiently before an untouched canvas on the easel.

"I tell you vat it is, Mr. Sdanwell, I can't make you out!" he lamented. "Last vinter you got a sdart that vould have kept most men going for years. After making dat hit with Mrs. Millington's picture you could have bainted half the town. And here you are sitting on your difan and saying you can't make up your mind to take another order. Vell, I can only say that if you dake much longer to make it up, you'll find some other chap has cut in and got your job. Mrs. Van Orley has been waiting since last August, and she dells me you haven't even answered her letter."

"How could I? I didn't know if I wanted to paint her."

"My goodness! Don't you know if you vant three thousand tollars?"

Stanwell surveyed his cigarette. "I'm not sure I do," he said.

Shepson flung out his hands. "Ask more den—but do it quick!"

Left to himself, Stanwell stood contemplating the canvas on which the dealer had riveted his reproachful gaze. It had been destined to reflect the opulent image of Mrs. Alpheus Van Orley, but some secret reluctance of Stanwell's had stayed the execution of the task. He had painted two of Mrs. Millington's friends in the spring, had been much praised and liberally paid for his work, and then, declining several orders to be executed at Newport, had surprised his friends by remaining quietly in town. It was not till August that he hired a little cottage on the New Jersey coast and invited the Arrans to visit him. They accepted the invitation, and the three had spent together six weeks of seashore idleness, during which Stanwell's modest rafters shook with Caspar's denunciations of his host's venality, and the brightness of Kate's gratitude was tempered by a tinge of reproach. But her grief over Stanwell's apostasy could not efface the fact that he had offered her brother the means of escape from town, and Stanwell himself was consoled by the reflection that but for Mrs. Millington's portrait he could not have performed even this trifling service for his friends.

When the Arrans left him in September he went to pay a few visits in the country, and on his return, a month later, to the studio building, he found that things had not gone well with Caspar. The little sculptor had caught cold, and the labour and expense of converting his gigantic off-spring into marble seemed to hang heavily upon him. He and Kate were living in a damp company of amorphous clay monsters, unfinished witnesses to the creative frenzy which had seized him after the sale of his group; and the doctor had urged that his patient should be removed to warmer and drier lodgings. But to uproot Caspar was impossible, and his sister could only feed the stove, and swaddle him in mufflers and felt slippers.

Stanwell found that during his absence Mungold had reappeared, fresh and rosy from a summer in Europe, and as prodigal as ever of the only form of attention which Kate could be counted on not to resent. The game and champagne reappeared with him, and he seemed as ready as Stanwell to lend a patient ear to Caspar's homilies. But Stanwell could see that, even now, Kate had not forgiven him for the Cupids. Stanwell himself had spent the early winter months in idleness. The sight of his tools filled him with a strange repugnance, and he absented himself as much as possible from the studio. But Shepson's visit roused him to the fact that he must decide on some definite course of action. If he wished to follow up his success of the previous spring he must refuse no more orders: he must not let Mrs. Van Orley slip away from him. He knew there were competitors enough ready to profit by his hesitations, and since his success was the result of a whim, a whim might undo it. With a gesture of decision he caught up his hat and left the studio.

On the landing he met Kate Arran. She too was going out, drawn forth by the sudden radiance of the January afternoon. She met him with a smile which seemed the answer to his uncertainties, and he asked if she had time to take a walk with him.

Yes; for once she had time, for Mr. Mungold was sitting with Caspar, and had promised to remain till she came in. It mattered

little to Stanwell that Mungold was with Caspar as long as he himself was with Kate; and he instantly soared to the suggestion that they should prolong the painter's vigil by taking the "elevated" to the Park. In this too his companion acquiesced after a moment of surprise: she seemed in a consenting mood, and Stanwell augured well from the fact.

The Park was clothed in the double glitter of snow and sunshine. They roamed the hard white alleys to a continuous tinkle of sleigh-bells, and Kate brightened with the exhilaration of the scene. It was not often that she permitted herself such an escape from routine, and in this new environment, which seemed to detach her from her daily setting, Stanwell had his first complete vision of her. To the girl also their unwonted isolation seemed to create a sense of fuller communion, for she began presently, as they reached the leafless solitude of the Ramble, to speak with sudden freedom of her brother. It appeared that the orders against which Caspar had so heroically steeled himself were slow in coming: he had received no commission since the sale of his group, and he was beginning to suffer from a reaction of discouragement. Oh, it was not the craving for popularity—Stanwell knew how far above that he stood. But it had been exquisite, yes, exquisite to him to find himself believed in, understood. He had fancied that the purchase of the group was the dawn of a tardy recognition—and now the darkness of indifference had closed in again, no one spoke of him, no one wrote of him, no one cared.

"If he were in good health it wouldn't matter—he would throw off such weakness, he'd live only for the joy of his work; but he's losing ground, his strength is failing, and he's so afraid there will not be time enough left—time enough for full recognition," she explained.

The quiver in her voice silenced Stanwell: he was afraid of echoing it with his own. At length he said: "Oh, more orders will come. Success is a gradual growth."

"Yes, *real* success," she said, with a solemn note in which he

caught—and forgave—a reflection on his own facile triumphs.

“But when the orders do come,” she continued, “will he have strength to carry them out? Last winter the doctor thought he only needed work to set him up; now he talks of rest instead! He says we ought to go to a warm climate—but how can Caspar leave the group?”

“Oh, hang the group—let him chuck the order!”

She looked at him tragically. “The money is spent,” she said.

Stanwell coloured to the roots of his hair. “But ill-health—ill-health excuses everything. If he goes away now he’ll come back good for twice the amount of work in the spring. A sculptor’s not expected to deliver a statue on a given day, like a package of groceries! You must do as the doctor says—you must make him chuck everything and go.”

They had reached a windless nook above the lake, and, pausing in the stress of their talk, she let herself sink on a bench beside the path. The movement encouraged him, and he seated himself at her side.

“You must take him away at once,” he repeated urgently. “He must be made comfortable—you must both be free from worry. And I want you to let me manage it for you—”

He broke off, silenced by her rising blush, her protesting murmur.

“Oh, stop, please; let me explain,” he went on. “I’m not talking of lending you money; I’m talking of giving you—myself. The offer may be just as unacceptable, but it’s of a kind to which it’s customary to accord a hearing. I should have made it a year ago—the first day I saw you, I believe!—but that, then, it wasn’t in my power to make things easier for you. Now, you know, I’ve had a little luck. Since I painted Mrs. Millington things have changed. I believe I can get as many orders as I choose—there are two or three people waiting now. What’s the use of it all, if it doesn’t bring me a little happiness? And the only happiness I know is the kind you can give me.”

He paused, suddenly losing the courage to look at her, so that her

pained murmur was framed for him in a glittering vision of the frozen lake. He turned with a start and met the refusal in her eyes.

“No—really no?” he repeated.

She shook her head silently.

“I could have helped you—I could have helped you!” he sighed.

She flushed distressfully, but kept her eyes on his.

“It’s just that—don’t you see?” she reproached him.

“Just that—the fact that I could be of use to you?”

“The fact that, as you say, things have changed since you painted Mrs. Millington. I haven’t seen the later portraits, but they tell me—”

“Oh, they’re just as bad!” Stanwell jeered.

“You’ve sold your talent, and you know it: that’s the dreadful part. You did it deliberately,” she cried with passion.

“Oh, deliberately,” he grimly assented.

“And you’re not ashamed—you talk of going on!”

“I’m not ashamed; I talk of going on.”

She received this with a long shuddering sigh, and turned her eyes away from him.

“Oh, why—why—why?” she lamented.

It was on the tip of Stanwell’s tongue to answer: “That I might say to you what I’m saying now—” but he replied instead: “A man may paint bad pictures and be a decent fellow. Look at Mungold, after all!”

The adjuration had an unexpected effect. Kate’s colour faded suddenly, and she sat motionless, with a stricken face.

“There’s a difference—” she began at length abruptly; “the difference you’ve always insisted on. Mr. Mungold paints as well as he can. He has no idea that his pictures are—less good than they might be.”

“Well—?”

“So he can’t be accused of doing what he does for money—of sacrificing anything better.” She turned on him with troubled eyes. “It was you who made me understand that, when Caspar used to

make fun of him.”

Stanwell smiled. “I’m glad you still think me a better painter than Mungold. But isn’t it hard that for that very reason I should starve in a hole? If I painted badly enough you’d see no objection to my living at the Waldorf!”

“Ah, don’t joke about it,” she murmured. “Don’t triumph in it.”

“I see no reason to at present,” said Stanwell drily. “But I won’t pretend to be ashamed when I’m not. I think there are occasions when a man is justified in doing what I’ve done.”

She looked at him solemnly. “What occasions?”

“Why, when he wants money, hang it!”

She drew a deep breath. “Money—money? Has Caspar’s example been nothing to you, then?”

“It hasn’t proved to me that I must starve while Mungold lives on truffles!”

Again her face changed and she stirred uneasily, and then rose to her feet.

“There’s no occasion which can justify an artist’s sacrificing his convictions!” she exclaimed.

Stanwell rose too, facing her with a mounting urgency which sent a flush to his cheek.

“Can’t you conceive such an occasion in my case? The wish, I mean, to make things easier for Caspar—to help you in any way you might let me?”

Her face reflected his blush, and she stood gazing at him with a wounded wonder.

“Caspar and I—you imagine we could live on money earned in *that* way?”

Stanwell made an impatient gesture. “You’ve got to live on something—or he has, even if you don’t include yourself!”

Her blush deepened miserably, but she held her head high.

“That’s just it—that’s what I came here to say to you.” She stood a moment gazing away from him at the lake.

He looked at her in surprise. "You came here to say something to me?"

"Yes. That we've got to live on something, Caspar and I, as you say; and since an artist cannot sacrifice his convictions, the sacrifice must—I mean—I wanted you to know that I have promised to marry Mr. Mungold."

"Mungold!" Stanwell cried with a sharp note of irony; but her white look checked it on his lips.

"I know all you are going to say," she murmured, with a kind of nobility which moved him even through his sense of its grotesqueness. "But you must see the distinction, because you first made it clear to me. I can take money earned in good faith—I can let Caspar live on it. I can marry Mr. Mungold because, though his pictures are bad, he does not prostitute his art."

She began to move away from him, and he followed her in silence along the frozen path.

When Stanwell re-entered his studio the dusk had fallen. He lit his lamp and rummaged out some writing-materials. Having found them, he wrote to Shepson to say that he could not paint Mrs. Van Orley, and did not care to accept any more orders for the present. He sealed and stamped the letter and flung it over the banisters for the janitor to post; then he dragged out his unfinished head of Kate Arran, replaced it on the easel, and sat down before it with a grim smile.

The Best Man

DUSK had fallen, and the circle of light shed by the lamp on Governor Mornway's writing-table just rescued from the surrounding dimness his own imposing bulk, thrown back in a deep chair in the lounging attitude habitual to him at that hour.

When the Governor of Midsylvania rested he rested completely. Five minutes earlier he had been bowed over his office desk, an Atlas with the State on his shoulders; now, his working hours over, he had the air of a man who has spent his day in desultory pleasure, and means to end it in the enjoyment of a good dinner. This freedom from care threw into relief the hovering unrest of his sister, Mrs. Nimick, who, just outside the circle of lamplight, haunted the gloom of the hearth, from which the wood fire now and then shot up an exploring flash into her face.

Mrs. Nimick's presence did not usually minister to repose; but the Governor's calm was too deep to be easily disturbed, and he felt the composure of a man who knows there is a mosquito in the room, but has drawn the netting close about his head. This composure reflected itself in the accent with which he said, throwing himself back to smile up at his sister: "You know I am not going to make any appointments for a week."

It was the day after the great reform victory which had put John Mornway for the second time at the head of his State, a triumph compared with which even the mighty battle of his first election sank into insignificance, and he leaned back with the sense of unassailable serenity which follows on successful effort.

Mrs. Nimick murmured an apology. "I didn't understand—I saw in this morning's papers that the Attorney-General was reappointed."

"Oh, Fleetwood—his reappointment was involved in the campaign. He's one of the principles I represent!"

Mrs. Nimick smiled a little tartly. "It seems odd to some people to think of Mr. Fleetwood in connection with principles."

The Governor's smile had no answering acerbity; the mention of his Attorney-General's name had set his blood humming with the thrill of the fight, and he wondered how it was that Fleetwood had not already been in to shake hands with him over their triumph.

"No," he said good-humouredly, "two years ago Fleetwood's name didn't stand for principles of any sort; but I believed in him, and look what he's done for me! I thought he was too big a man not to see in time that statesmanship is a finer thing than politics, and now that I've given him a chance to make the discovery he's on the way to becoming just such a statesman as the country needs."

"Oh, it's a great deal easier and pleasanter to believe in people," replied Mrs. Nimick, in a tone of occult allusion, "and of course we all knew Mr. Fleetwood would have a hearing before any one else."

The Governor took this imperturbably. "Well, at any rate, he isn't going to fill all the offices in the State; there will probably be one or two to spare after he has helped himself, and when the time comes I'll think over your man, I'll consider him."

Mrs. Nimick brightened. "It would make *such* a difference to Jack—it might mean anything to the poor boy to have Mr. Ashford appointed!"

The Governor held up a warning hand.

"Oh, I know, one mustn't say that, or at least you mustn't listen. You're so dreadfully afraid of nepotism. But I'm not asking for Jack—I've never asked for a crust for any of us, thank Heaven! No one can point to *me*—" Mrs. Nimick checked herself and continued in a more impersonal tone: "But there's no harm, surely, in my saying a word for Mr. Ashford, when I know he's actually under consideration. I

don't see why the fact that Jack is in his office should prevent my speaking."

"On the contrary," said the Governor, "it implies, on your part, a personal knowledge of Mr. Ashford's qualifications which may be of great help to me in reaching a decision."

Mrs. Nimick never quite knew how to meet him when he took that tone, and the flickering fire made her face for a moment the picture of uncertainty; then at all hazards she launched out: "Well, I've Ella's promise at any rate."

The Governor sat upright. "Ella's promise?"

"To back me up. She thoroughly approves of him!"

The Governor smiled. "You talk as if my wife had a political *salon* and distributed *lettres de cachet*! I'm glad she approves of Ashford; but if you think she makes my appointments for me—" He broke off with a laugh at the superfluity of the protest.

Mrs. Nimick reddened. "One never knows how you will take the simplest thing. What harm is there in my saying that Ella approves of Mr. Ashford? I thought you liked her to take an interest in your work."

"I like it immensely. But I shouldn't care to have it take that form."

"What form?"

"That of promising to use her influence to get people appointed. But you always talk of politics in the vocabulary of European courts. Thank Heaven, Ella has less imagination. She has her sympathies, of course, but she doesn't think they can affect the distribution of offices."

Mrs. Nimick gathered up her furs with an air at once crestfallen and resentful. "I'm sorry—I always seem to say the wrong thing. I'm sure I came with the best intentions—it's natural that your sister should want to be with you at such a happy moment."

"Of course, it is, my dear," exclaimed the Governor genially, as he rose to grasp the hands with which she was nervously adjusting her wraps.

Mrs. Nimick, who lived a little way out of town, and whose visits to her brother were apparently achieved at the cost of immense effort and mysterious complications, had come to congratulate him on his victory, and to sound him regarding the nomination to a coveted post of the lawyer to whose office her eldest son had lately been admitted. In the urgency of the latter errand she had rather lost sight of the former, but her face softened as the Governor, keeping her hands in his, said in the voice which always seemed to put the most generous interpretation on her motives: "I was sure you'd be one of the first to give me your blessing."

"Oh, your success—no one feels it more than I do!" sighed Mrs. Nimick, always at home in the emotional key. "I keep in the background, I make no noise, I claim no credit, but whatever happens, no one shall ever prevent my rejoicing in my brother's success!"

Mrs. Nimick's felicitations were always couched in the conditional, with a side-glance at dark contingencies, and the Governor, smiling at the familiar construction, returned cheerfully: "I don't see why any one should want to deprive you of that privilege."

"They couldn't—they couldn't—" Mrs. Nimick affirmed.

"Well, I'm in the saddle for another two years at any rate, so you'd better put in all the rejoicing you can."

"Whatever happens—whatever happens!" cried Mrs. Nimick, melting on his bosom.

"The only thing likely to happen at present is that you'll miss your train if I let you go on saying nice things to me much longer."

Mrs. Nimick at this dried her eyes, renewed her clutch on her draperies, and stood glancing sentimentally about the room while her brother rang for the carriage.

"I take away a lovely picture of you," she murmured. "It's wonderful what you've made of this hideous house."

"Ah, not I, but Ella—here she *does* reign undisputed," he acknowledged, following her glance about the library, which wore an

air of permanent habitation, of slowly formed intimacy with its inmates, in marked contrast to the gaudy impersonality of the usual executive apartment.

“Oh, she’s wonderful, wonderful! I see she has got those imported damask curtains she was looking at the other day at Fielding’s. When I’m asked how she does it all, I always say it’s beyond me!”

“It’s an art like another,” smiled the Governor. “Ella has been used to living in tents and she has the knack of giving them a wonderful look of permanence.”

“She certainly makes the most wonderful bargains—all the knack in the world won’t take the place of such curtains and carpets.”

“Are they good? I’m glad to hear it. But all the curtains and carpets won’t make a house comfortable to live in. There’s where the knack comes in, you see.”

He recalled with a shudder the lean Congressional years—the years before his marriage—when Mrs. Nimick had lived with him in Washington, and the daily struggle in the House had been combined with domestic conflicts almost as recurrent. The offer of a foreign mission, though disconnecting him from active politics, had the advantage of freeing him from his sister’s tutelage, and in Europe, where he remained for two years, he had met the lady who was to become his wife. Mrs. Renfield was the widow of one of the diplomatists who languish in perpetual first secretaryship at our various embassies. Her life had given her ease without triviality, and a sense of the importance of politics seldom found in ladies of her nationality. She regarded a public life as the noblest and most engrossing of careers, and combined with great social versatility an equal gift for reading blue-books and studying debates. So sincere was the latter taste that she passed without regret from the amenities of a European life well stocked with picturesque intimacies to the rawness of the Midsylvanian capital. She helped Mornway in his fight for the Governorship as a man likes to be helped by a woman—by her tact, her good looks, her memory for faces, her knack of

saying the right thing to the right person, and her capacity for obscure hard work in the background of his public activity. But, above all, she helped him by making his private life smooth and harmonious. For a man careless of personal ease Mornway was singularly alive to the domestic amenities. Attentive service, well-ordered dinners, brightly burning fires, and a scent of flowers in the house—these material details, which had come to seem the extension of his wife's personality, the inevitable result of her nearness, were as agreeable to him after five years of marriage as in the first surprise of his introduction to them. Mrs. Nimick had kept house jerkily and vociferously; Ella performed the same task silently and imperceptibly, and the results were all in favour of the latter method. Though neither the Governor nor his wife had large means, the household, under Mrs. Mornway's guidance, took on an air of sober luxury as agreeable to her husband as it was exasperating to her sister-in-law. The domestic machinery ran without a jar. There were no upheavals, no debts, no squalid cookless hiatuses between intervals of showy hospitality: the household moved along on lines of quiet elegance and comfort, behind which only the eye of the housekeeping sex could have detected a gradually increasing scale of expense.

Such an eye was now projected on the Governor's surroundings, and its conclusions were summed up in the tone in which Mrs. Nimick repeated from the threshold: "I always say I don't see how she does it!"

The tone did not escape the Governor, but it disturbed him no more than the buzz of a baffled insect. Poor Grace! It was not his fault if her husband was given to chimerical investments, if her sons were "unsatisfactory" and her cooks would not stay with her; but it was natural that these facts should throw into irritating contrast the ease and harmony of his own domestic life. It made him all the sorrier for his sister to know that her envy did not penetrate to the essence of his happiness, but lingered on those external signs of well-

being which counted for so little in the sum total of his advantages. Poor Mrs. Nimick's life seemed doubly thin and mean when one remembered that, beneath its shabby surface, there were no compensating riches of the spirit.

II

It was the custodian of his own hidden treasure who at this moment broke in upon his musings. Mrs. Mornway, fresh from her afternoon drive, entered the room with that air of ease and lightness which seemed to diffuse a social warmth about her; fine, slender, pliant, so polished and modelled by an intelligent experience of life that youth seemed clumsy in her presence. She looked down at her husband and shook her head.

"You promised to keep the afternoon to yourself, and I hear Grace has been here."

"Poor Grace—she didn't stay long, and I should have been a brute not to see her."

He leaned back, filling his gaze to the brim with her charming image, which obliterated at a stroke the fretful ghost of Mrs. Nimick.

"She came to congratulate you?"

"Yes; and to ask me to do something for Ashford."

"Ah—on account of Jack. What does she want for him?"

The Governor laughed. "She said you were in her confidence—that you were backing her up. She seemed to think your support would ensure her success."

Mrs. Mornway smiled; her smile, always full of delicate implications, seemed to caress her husband while it gently mocked his sister.

"Poor Grace! I suppose you undeceived her."

"As to your influence? I told her it was paramount where it ought to be."

"And where is that?"

"In the choice of carpets and curtains. It seems ours are almost too

good.”

“Thanks for the compliment! Too good for what?”

“Our station in life, I suppose. At least they seemed to bother Grace.”

“Poor Grace! I’ve always bothered her.” She paused, removing her gloves reflectively and laying her long fine hands on his shoulders as she stood behind him. “Then you don’t believe in Ashford?” Feeling his slight start, she drew away her hands and raised them to detach her veil.

“What makes you think I don’t believe in Ashford?”

“I asked out of curiosity. I wondered whether you had decided anything.”

“No, and I don’t mean to for a week. I’m dead beat, and I want to bring a fresh mind to the question. There is hardly one appointment I’m sure of except, of course, Fleetwood’s.”

She turned away from him, smoothing her hair in the mirror above the mantelpiece. “You’re sure of that?” she asked after a moment.

“Of George Fleetwood? And poor Grace thinks you’re deep in my counsels! I am as sure of reappointing Fleetwood as I am that I’ve just been re-elected myself. I’ve never made any secret of the fact that if they wanted me back they must have him too.”

“You’re tremendously generous!” she murmured.

“Generous? What a strange word! Fleetwood is my trump card—the one man I can count on to carry out my ideas through thick and thin.”

She mused on this, smiling a little. “That’s why I call you generous—when I remember how you disliked him two years ago!”

“What of that? I was prejudiced against him, I own; or rather, I had a just distrust of a man with such a past. But how splendidly he’s wiped it out! What a record he’s written on the new leaf he promised to turn over if I gave him the chance! Do you know,” the Governor interrupted himself with a reminiscent laugh, “I was rather annoyed with Grace when she hinted that you had promised to back up

Ashford— I told her you didn't aspire to distribute patronage. But she might have reminded me—if she'd known—that it *was* you who persuaded me to give Fleetwood that chance.”

Mrs. Mornway turned with a slight heightening of colour. “Grace—how could she possibly have known?”

“She couldn't, of course, unless she'd read my weakness in my face. But why do you look so startled at my little joke?”

“It's only that I so dislike Grace's ineradicable idea that I am a wire-puller. Why should she imagine I would help her about Ashford?”

“Oh, Grace has always been a mild and ineffectual conspirator, and she thinks every other woman is built on the same plan. But you *did* get Fleetwood's job for him, you know,” he repeated with laughing insistence.

“I had more faith than you in human nature, that's all.” She paused a moment, and then added: “Personally, you know, I've always rather disliked him.”

“Oh, I never doubted your disinterestedness. But you're not going to turn against your candidate, are you?”

She hesitated. “I am not sure; circumstances alter cases. When you made Mr. Fleetwood Attorney-General two years ago he was the inevitable man for the place.”

“Well—is there a better one now?”

“I don't say there is—it's not my business to look for him, at any rate. What I mean is that at that time he was worth risking anything for—now I don't know that he is.”

“But even if he were not, what do I risk for him now? I don't see your point. Since he didn't cost me my re-election what can he possibly cost me now I'm in?”

“He's immensely unpopular. He will cost you a great deal of popularity, and you have never pretended to despise that.”

“No, nor ever sacrificed anything essential to it. Are you really asking me to offer up Fleetwood to it now?”

"I don't ask you to do anything—except to consider if he is essential. You said you were over-tired and wanted to bring a fresh mind to bear on the other appointments. Why not delay this one too?"

Mornway turned in his chair and looked at her searchingly. "This means something, Ella. What have you heard?"

"Just what you have, probably, but with more attentive ears. The very record you are so proud of has made George Fleetwood innumerable enemies in the last two years. The Lead Trust people are determined to ruin him, and if his reappointment is attacked you will not be spared."

"Attacked? In the papers, you mean?"

She paused. "You know the 'Spy' has always threatened a campaign. And he has a past, as you say!"

"Which was public property long before I first appointed him. Nothing could be gained by raking up his old political history. Everybody knows he didn't come to me with clean hands, but to hurt him now the 'Spy' would have to fasten a new scandal on him, and that would not be easy."

"It would be easy to invent one!"

"Unproved accusations don't count much against a man of such proved capacity. The best answer is his record of the last two years. That's what the public looks at."

"The public looks wherever the press points. And besides, you have your own future to consider. It would be a pity to sacrifice such a career as yours for the sake of backing up even as useful a man as George Fleetwood." She paused, as if checked by his gathering frown, but went on with fresh decision: "Oh, I'm not speaking of personal ambition; I'm thinking of the good you can do. Will Fleetwood's reappointment secure the greatest good of the greatest number, if his unpopularity reacts on you to the extent of hindering your career?"

The Governor's brow cleared and he rose with a smile. "My dear,

your reasoning is admirable, but we must leave my career to take care of itself. Whatever I may be to-morrow I am Governor of Midsylvania to-day, and my business as Governor is to appoint as Attorney-General the best man I can find for the place—and the best man is George Fleetwood, unless you have a better to propose.”

She met this with perfect good-humour. “No; I have told you already that that’s not my business. But I *have* a candidate of my own for another office, so Grace was not quite wrong, after all.”

“Well, who is your candidate, and for what office? I only hope you don’t want to change cooks!”

“Oh, I do that without your authority, and you never even know it has been done.” She hesitated, and then said with a bright directness: “I want you to do something for poor Gregg.”

“Gregg? Rufus Gregg?” He stared. “What a strange request! What can I do for a man I’ve had to kick out for dishonesty?”

“Not much, perhaps; I know it’s difficult. But, after all, it was your kicking him out that ruined him.”

“It was his dishonesty that ruined him. He was getting a good salary as my stenographer, and if he hadn’t sold those letters to the ‘Spy’ he would have been getting it still.”

She wavered. “After all, nothing was proved—he always denied it.”

“Good heavens, Ella! Have you ever doubted his guilt?”

“No—no; I don’t mean that. But of course his wife and children believe in him, and think you were cruel, and he has been out of work so long that they’re starving.”

“Send them some money, then; I wonder you thought it necessary to ask.”

“I shouldn’t have thought it so, but money is not what I want. Mrs. Gregg is proud, and it’s hard to help her in that way. Couldn’t you give him work of some kind—just a little post in a corner?”

“My dear child, the little posts in the corner are just the ones where honesty is essential. A footpad doesn’t wait under a street-

lamp! Besides, how can I recommend a man whom I've dismissed for theft? I'll say nothing to hinder his getting a place, but on my conscience I can't give him one."

She paused and turned toward the door silently, though without any show of resentment; but on the threshold she lingered long enough to say: "Yet you gave Fleetwood his chance!"

"Fleetwood? You class Fleetwood with Gregg? The best man in the State with a little beggarly thieving nonentity? It's clear enough you're new at wire-pulling, or you'd show more skill at it!"

She met this with a laugh. "I'm not likely to have much practice if my first attempt is such a failure. Well, I'll see if Mrs. Gregg will let me help her a little—I suppose there's nothing else to be done."

"Nothing that we can do. If Gregg wants a place he had better get one on the staff of the 'Spy.' He served them better than he did me."

III

The Governor stared at the card with a frown.

Half an hour had elapsed since his wife had gone upstairs to dress for the big dinner from which official duties excused him, and he was still lingering over the fire before preparing for his own solitary meal. He expected no one that evening but his old friend Hadley Shackwell, with whom it was his long-established habit to talk over his defeats and victories in the first lull after the conflict; and Shackwell was not likely to turn up till nine. The unwonted stillness of the room, and the knowledge that he had a quiet evening before him, filled the Governor with a luxurious sense of repose. The world seemed to him a good place to be in, and his complacency was shadowed only by the fear that he had perhaps been a trifle harsh in refusing his wife's plea for the stenographer. There seemed, therefore, a certain fitness in the appearance of the man's card, and the Governor with a sigh gave orders that Gregg should be admitted.

Gregg was still the soft-stepping scoundrel who invited the toe of honesty, and Mornway, as he entered, was conscious of a sharp

revulsion of feeling. But it was impossible to evade the interview, and he sat silent while the man stated his case.

Mrs. Mornway had represented the stenographer as being in desperate straits, and ready to accept any job that could be found, but though his appearance might have seemed to corroborate her account he apparently took a less hopeless view of his case, and the Governor found with surprise that he had fixed his eye on a clerkship in one of the Government offices, a post which had been half promised him before the incident of the letters. His plea was that the Governor's charge, though unproved, had so injured his reputation that he could hope to clear himself only by getting some sort of small job under the administration. After that it would be easy for him to obtain any employment he wanted.

He met Mornway's refusal with civility, but remarked after a moment: "I hadn't expected this, Governor. Mrs. Mornway led me to think that something might be arranged."

The Governor's tone was brief. "Mrs. Mornway is sorry for your wife and children, and for their sake would be glad to find work for you, but she could not have led you to think that there was any chance of your getting a clerkship."

"Well, that's just it; she said she thought she could manage it."

"You have misinterpreted my wife's interest in your family. Mrs. Mornway has nothing to do with the distribution of Government offices." The Governor broke off, annoyed to find himself asserting for the second time so obvious a fact.

There was a moment's silence; then Gregg said, still in a perfectly equable tone: "You've always been hard on me, Governor, but I don't bear malice. You accused me of selling those letters to the 'Spy'—"

The Governor made an impatient gesture.

"You couldn't prove your case," Gregg went on, "but you were right in one respect. I was on confidential terms with the 'Spy.' " He paused and glanced at Mornway, whose face remained immovable. "I'm on the same terms with them still, and I'm ready to let you have

the benefit of it if you'll give *me* the chance to retrieve my good name."

In spite of his irritation the Governor could not repress a smile.

"In other words, you'll do a dirty trick for me if I undertake to convince people that you're the soul of honour." Gregg smiled also.

"There are always two ways of putting a thing. Why not call it a plain case of give and take? I want something and can pay for it."

"Not in any coin I have a use for," said Mornway, pushing back his chair.

Gregg hesitated; then he said: "Perhaps you don't mean to reappoint Fleetwood." The Governor was silent, and he continued: "If you do, don't kick me out a second time. I'm not threatening you—I'm speaking as a friend. Mrs. Mornway has been kind to us, and I'd like to help her."

The Governor rose, gripping his chair-back sternly. "You'll be kind enough to leave my wife's name out of the discussion. I supposed you knew me well enough to know that I don't buy newspaper secrets at any price, least of all at that of the public money!"

Gregg, who had risen also, stood a few feet off, looking at him inscrutably.

"Is that final, Governor?"

"Quite final."

"Well, good-evening."

IV

Shackwell and the Governor sat over the evening embers. It was after ten o'clock, and the servant had carried away the coffee and liqueurs, leaving the two men to their cigars. Mornway had once more lapsed into his arm-chair, and sat with outstretched feet, gazing comfortably at his friend.

Shackwell was a small dry man of fifty, with a face as sallow and freckled as a winter pear, a limp moustache and shrewd melancholy eyes.

"I'm glad you have given yourself a day's rest," he said, looking at the Governor.

"Well, I don't know that I needed it. There's such exhilaration in victory that I never felt fresher."

"Ah, but the fight's just beginning."

"I know—but I'm ready for it. You mean the campaign against Fleetwood. I understand there is to be a big row. Well, he and I are used to rows."

Shackwell paused, surveying his cigar. "You knew the 'Spy' meant to lead the attack?"

"Yes. I was offered a glimpse of the documents this afternoon."

Shackwell started up. "You didn't refuse?"

Mornway related the incident of Gregg's visit. "I could hardly buy my information at that price," he said, "and, besides, it's really Fleetwood's business this time. I suppose he has heard the report, but it doesn't seem to bother him. I rather thought he would have looked in to-day to talk things over, but I haven't seen him."

Shackwell continued to twist his cigar through his fingers without remembering to light it. "You're determined to reappoint Fleetwood?" he asked.

The Governor caught him up. "You're the fourth person who has asked me that to-day! You haven't lost faith in him, have you, Hadley?"

"Not an atom!" said the other with emphasis.

"Well, then, what are you all thinking of, to suppose I can be frightened by a little newspaper talk? Besides, if Fleetwood is not afraid, why should I be?"

"Because you'll be involved in it with him."

The Governor laughed. "What have they got against me now?"

Shackwell, standing up, confronted his friend solemnly. "This—that Fleetwood bought his appointment two years ago."

"Ah—bought it of me? Why didn't it come out at the time?"

"Because it wasn't known. It has only been found out lately."

“Known—found out? This is magnificent! What was my price, and what did I do with the money?”

Shackwell glanced about the room, and his eyes returned to Mornway’s face.

“Look here, John, Fleetwood is not the only man in the world.”

“The only man?”

“The only Attorney-General. The ‘Spy’ has the Lead Trust behind it and means to put up a savage fight. Mud sticks, and—”

“Hadley, is this a conspiracy? You’re saying to me just what Ella said this afternoon.”

At the mention of Mrs. Mornway’s name a silence fell between the two men and the Governor moved uneasily in his chair.

“You are not advising me to chuck Fleetwood because the ‘Spy’ is going to accuse me of having sold him his first appointment?” he said at length.

Shackwell drew a deep breath. “You say yourself that Mrs. Mornway gave you the same advice this afternoon.”

“Well, what of that? Do you imagine that my wife distrib—” The Governor broke off with an exasperated laugh.

Shackwell, leaning against the mantelpiece, looked down into the embers. “I didn’t say the ‘Spy’ meant to accuse *you* of having sold the office.”

Mornway stood up slowly, his eyes on his friend’s averted face. The ashes dropped from his cigar, scattering a white trail across the carpet which had excited Mrs. Nimick’s envy.

“The office is in my gift. If I didn’t sell it, who did?” he demanded.

Shackwell laid a hand on his arm. “For heaven’s sake, John—”

“Who did, who did?” the Governor violently repeated.

The two men faced each other in the curtained silence of the dim luxurious room. Shackwell’s eyes again wandered, as if summoning the walls to reply. Then he said: “I have positive information that the ‘Spy’ will say nothing if you don’t appoint Fleetwood.”

“And what will it say if I do?”

“That he bought his first appointment from your wife.”

The Governor stood silent, immovable, while the blood crept slowly from his strong neck to his lowering brows. Once he laughed, then he set his lips and continued to gaze into the fire. After a while he looked at his cigar and shook the freshly formed cone of ashes carefully on the hearth. He had just turned again to Shackwell when the door opened and the butler announced: “Mr. Fleetwood.”

The room swam about Shackwell, and when he recovered himself Mornway, with outstretched hand, was advancing quietly to meet his guest.

Fleetwood was a smaller man than the Governor. He was erect and compact, with a dry energetic face which seemed to press forward with the spring of his prominent features, as though it were the weapon with which he cleared his way through the world. He was in evening dress, scrupulously appointed, but pale and nervous. Of the two men, it was Mornway who was the more composed.

“I thought I should have seen you before this,” he said. Fleetwood returned his grasp and shook hands with Shackwell.

“I knew you needed to be let alone. I didn’t mean to come to-night, but I wanted to say a word to you.”

At this Shackwell, who had fallen into the background, made a motion of leave-taking; but the Governor arrested it.

“We haven’t any secrets from Hadley, have we, Fleetwood?”

“Certainly not. I am glad to have him stay. I’ve simply come to say that I’ve been thinking over my future arrangements, and that I find it will not be possible for me to continue in office.”

There was a long pause, during which Shackwell kept his eyes on Mornway. The Governor had turned pale, but when he spoke his voice was full and firm.

“This is sudden,” he said.

Fleetwood stood leaning against a high chair-back, fretting its carved ornaments with restless fingers. “It is sudden—yes. I—there are a variety of reasons.”

"Is one of them the fact that you're afraid of what the 'Spy' is going to say?"

The Attorney-General flushed deeply and moved away a few steps. "I'm sick of mud-throwing," he muttered.

"George Fleetwood!" Mornway exclaimed. He had advanced toward his friend, and the two stood confronting each other, already oblivious of Shackwell's presence.

"It's not only that, of course. I've been frightfully hard-worked. My health has given way—"

"Since yesterday?"

Fleetwood forced a smile. "My dear fellow, what a slave-driver you are! Hasn't a man the right to take a rest?"

"Not a soldier on the eve of battle. You've never failed me before."

"I don't want to fail you now. But it isn't the eve of battle—you're in, and that's the main thing."

"The main thing at present is that you promised to stay in with me, and that I must have your real reason for breaking your word."

Fleetwood made a deprecatory movement. "My dear Governor, if you only knew it, I'm doing you a service in backing out."

"A service—why?"

"Because I'm hated—because the Lead Trust wants my blood, and will have yours too if you appoint me."

"Ah, that's the real reason, then—you're afraid of the 'Spy'?"

"Afraid—?"

The Governor continued to speak with dry deliberation. "Evidently, then, you know what they mean to say."

Fleetwood laughed. "One needn't do that to be sure it will be abominable!"

"Who cares how abominable, if it's untrue?"

Fleetwood shrugged his shoulders and was silent. Shackwell, from a distant seat, uttered a faint protesting sound, but no one heard. The Governor stood squarely before Fleetwood, his hands in his pockets. "It is true, then?" he demanded.

“What is true?”

“What the ‘Spy’ means to say—that you bought my wife’s influence to get your first appointment.”

In the silence Shackwell started to his feet. A sound of carriage-wheels had disturbed the quiet street. They paused and then rolled up the semicircle to the door of the Executive Mansion.

“John!” Shackwell warned him.

The Governor turned impatiently; there was the sound of a servant’s steps in the hall, followed by the opening and closing of the outer door.

“Your wife—Mrs. Mornway!” Shackwell cried.

Another step, accompanied by a soft rustle of skirts, was advancing toward the library.

“My wife? Let her come!” said the Governor.

V

She stood before them in her bright evening dress, with an arrested brilliancy of aspect like the sparkle of a fountain suddenly caught in ice. Her look moved from one to the other; then she came forward, while Shackwell slipped behind her to close the door.

“What has happened?” she said.

Shackwell began to speak, but the Governor interposed calmly: “Fleetwood has come to tell me that he does not wish to remain in office.”

“Ah!” she murmured.

There was another silence. Fleetwood broke it by saying: “It is getting late. If you want to see me to-morrow—”

The Governor looked from his face to Ella’s. “Yes; goodnight,” he said.

Shackwell moved in Fleetwood’s wake to the door. Mrs. Mornway stood with her head high, smiling slightly. She shook hands with each of the men in turn; then she moved toward the sofa and laid

aside her shining cloak. All her gestures were calm and noble, but as she raised her hand to unclasp the cloak her husband uttered a sudden exclamation.

“Where did you get that bracelet? I don’t remember it.”

“This?” She looked at him with astonishment. “It belonged to my mother. I don’t often wear it.”

“Ah—I shall suspect everything now,” he groaned.

He turned away and flung himself with bowed head in the chair behind his writing-table. He wanted to collect himself, to question her, to get to the bottom of the hideous abyss over which his imagination tottered. But what was the use? What did the facts matter? He had only to put his memories together—they led him straight to the truth. Every incident of the day seemed to point a leering finger in the same direction, from Mrs. Nimick’s allusion to the damask curtains to Gregg’s confident appeal for rehabilitation.

“If you imagine that my wife distributes patronage—” he heard himself repeating inanely, and the walls seemed to reverberate with the laughter which his sister and Gregg had suppressed. He heard Ella rise from the sofa and lifted his head.

“Sit still!” he commanded.

She sank back without speaking, and he hid his face again. The past months, the past years, were dancing a witches’ dance about him. He remembered a hundred significant things. . . . *Oh God*, he cried to himself, *if only she does not lie about it!* Suddenly he recalled having pitied Mrs. Nimick because she could not penetrate to the essence of his happiness. Those were the very words he had used! He heard himself laugh aloud. The clock struck—it went on striking interminably. At length he heard his wife rise again and say with sudden authority: “John, you must speak.”

Authority—she spoke to him with authority! He laughed again, and through his laugh he heard the senseless rattle of the words “If you imagine that my wife distributes patronage . . .”

He looked up and saw her standing before him. If only she would

not lie about it! He said: "You see what has happened."

"I suppose some one has told you about the 'Spy.' "

"Who told you? Gregg?" he interposed.

"Yes," she said quietly.

"That was why you wanted—?"

"Why I wanted you to help him? Yes."

"Oh, God! . . . He wouldn't take money?"

"No, he wouldn't take money."

He sat silent, looking at her, noting with a morbid minuteness the exquisite finish of her dress, that finish which seemed so much a part of herself that it had never before struck him as a mere purchasable accessory. He knew so little what a woman's dresses cost! For a moment he lost himself in vague calculations; finally he said: "What did you do it for?"

"Do what?"

"Take money from Fleetwood."

She paused a moment before replying: "If you will let me explain —"

And then he saw that, all along, he had thought she would be able to disprove it! A smothering blackness closed in on him, and he had a physical struggle for breath. He forced himself to his feet and said: "He was your lover?"

"Oh, no, no, *no!*" she cried with conviction. He hardly knew whether the shadow lifted or deepened; the fact that he instantly believed her seemed only to increase his bewilderment. Presently he found that she was still speaking, and he began to listen to her, catching a phrase now and then through the deafening noise of his thoughts.

It amounted to this—that just after her husband's first election, when Fleetwood's claims for the Attorney-Generalship were being vainly pressed by a group of his political backers, Mrs. Mornway had chanced to sit next to him once or twice at dinner. One day, on the strength of these meetings, he had called and asked her frankly if she

would not help him with her husband. He made a clean breast of his past, but said that, under a man like Mornway, he felt he could wipe out his political sins and purify himself while he served the party. She knew the party needed his brains, and she believed in him—she was sure he would keep his word. She would have spoken in his favour in any case—she would have used all her influence to overcome her husband's prejudice—and it was by a mere accident that, in the course of one of their talks, he happened to give her a “tip” (his past connections were still useful for such purposes), a “tip” which, in the first invading pressure of debt after Mornway's election, she had not had the courage to refuse. Fleetwood had made some money for her—yes, about thirty thousand dollars. She had repaid what he had lent her, and there had been no farther transactions of the kind between them. But it appeared that Gregg, before his dismissal, had got hold of an old cheque-book which gave a hint of the story, and had pieced the rest together with the help of a clerk in Fleetwood's office. The “Spy” was in possession of the facts, but did not mean to use them if Fleetwood was not reappointed, the Lead Trust having no personal grudge against Mornway.

Her story ended there, and she sat silent while her husband continued to look at her. So much had perished in the wreck of his faith that he did not attach great value to what remained. It scarcely mattered that he believed her when the truth was so sordid. There had been, after all, nothing to envy him for but what Mrs. Nimick had seen; the core of his life was as mean and miserable as his sister's. . . .

His wife rose at length, pale but still calm. She had a kind of external dignity which she wore like one of her rich dresses. It seemed as little a part of her now as the finery of which his gaze contemptuously reckoned the cost.

“John—” she began, laying her hand on his shoulder.

He looked up wearily. “You'd better go to bed,” he said.

“Don’t look at me in that way. I’m prepared for your being angry with me—I made a dreadful mistake and must bear my punishment: any punishment you choose to inflict. But you must think of yourself first—you must spare yourself. Why should you be so horribly unhappy? Don’t you see that since Mr. Fleetwood has behaved so well we’re quite safe? And I swear to you I’ve paid back every penny.”

VI

Three days later Shackwell was summoned by telephone to the Governor’s office in the Capitol. There had been, in the interval, no communication between the two, and the papers had been silent or noncommittal.

In the lobby Shackwell met Fleetwood leaving the building. For a moment the Attorney-General seemed about to speak; then he nodded and passed on, leaving to Shackwell the impression of a face more than ever thrust forward like a weapon.

The Governor sat behind his desk in the autumn sunlight. In contrast to Fleetwood he seemed relaxed and unwieldy, and the face he turned to his friend had a gray look of convalescence. Shackwell wondered, with a start of apprehension, if he and Fleetwood had been together.

He relieved himself of his overcoat without speaking, and when he turned again toward Mornway he was surprised to find the latter watching him with a smile.

“It’s good to see you, Hadley,” the Governor said.

“I waited to be sent for; I knew you’d let me know when you wanted me,” Shackwell replied.

“I didn’t send for you on purpose. If I had I might have asked your advice, and I didn’t want to ask anybody’s advice but my own.” The Governor spoke steadily, but in a voice a trifle too well controlled to be natural. “I’ve had a three days’ conference with myself,” he continued, “and now that everything is settled I want you to do me a

favour.”

“Yes?” Shackwell assented. The private issues of the affair were still wrapped in mystery to him, but he had never had a moment’s doubt as to its public solution, and he had no difficulty in conjecturing the nature of the service he was to render. His heart ached for Mornway, but he was glad the inevitable step was to be taken without farther delay.

“Everything is settled,” the Governor repeated, “and I want you to notify the press that I’ve decided to reappoint Fleetwood.”

Shackwell bounded from his seat. “Good heavens!”

“To reappoint Fleetwood,” the Governor repeated, “because at the present juncture of affairs he’s the only man for the place. The work we began together is not finished, and I can’t finish it without him. Remember the vistas opened by the Lead Trust investigation—he knows where they lead and no one else does. We must put that enquiry through, no matter what it costs us, and that’s why I’ve sent for you to take this letter to the ‘Spy.’ “

Shackwell’s hand drew back from the proffered envelope.

“You say you don’t want my advice, but you can’t expect me to go on such an errand with my eyes shut. What on earth are you driving at? Of course Fleetwood will persist in refusing.”

Mornway smiled. “He did persist—for three hours. But when he left here just now he’d given me his word to accept.”

Shackwell groaned. “Then I’m dealing with two madmen instead of one.”

The Governor laughed. “My poor Hadley, you’re worse than I expected. I thought you would understand me.”

“Understand you? How can I, in heaven’s name, when I don’t understand the situation?”

“The situation—the situation?” Mornway repeated slowly. “Whose? His or mine? I don’t either—I haven’t had time to think of them.”

“What on earth have you been thinking of, then?”

The Governor rose, with a gesture toward the window, through which, below the slope of the Capitol grounds, the roofs and steeples of the city spread their smoky mass to the mild air.

“Of all that is left,” he said. “Of everything except Fleetwood and myself.”

“Ah—” Shackwell murmured.

Mornway turned back and sank into his seat. “Don’t you see that was all I had to turn to? The State—the country—it’s big enough, in all conscience, to fill a good deal of a void! My own walls had grown too cramped for me, so I just stepped outside. You’ve no idea how it simplified matters. All I had to do was to say to myself: ‘Go ahead, and do the best you can for the country.’ The personal issue simply didn’t exist.”

“Yes—and then?”

“Then I turned over for three days this question of the Attorney-Generalship. I couldn’t see that it was changed—how should *my* feelings have affected it? Fleetwood hasn’t betrayed the State. There isn’t a scar on his public record—he’s still the best man for the place. My business is to appoint the best man I can find, and I can’t find any one as good as Fleetwood.”

“But—but—your wife?” Shackwell stammered.

The Governor looked up with surprise. Shackwell could almost have sworn that he had indeed forgotten the private issue.

“My wife is ready to face the consequences,” he said.

Shackwell returned to his former attitude of incredulity.

“But Fleetwood? Fleetwood has no right to sacrifice—”

“To sacrifice my wife to the State? Oh, let us beware of big words. Fleetwood was inclined to use them at first, but I managed to restore his sense of proportion. I showed him that our private lives are only a few feet square, and that really, to breathe freely, one must get out of them into the open.” He paused and broke out with sudden violence: “My God, Hadley, don’t you see that Fleetwood had to obey me?”

“Yes—I see that,” said Shackwell, with reviving obstinacy. “But if you’ve reached such a height and pulled him up to your side it seems to me that from that standpoint you ought to get an even clearer view of the madness of your position. You say you’ve decided to sacrifice your own feelings and your wife’s—though I’m not so sure of your right to dispose of *her* voice in the matter; but what if you sacrifice the party and the State as well, in this transcendental attempt to distinguish between private and public honour? You’ll have to answer that before you can get me to carry this letter.”

The Governor did not blench under the attack.

“I think the letter will answer you,” he said.

“The letter?”

“Yes. It’s something more than a notification of Fleetwood’s reappointment.” Mornway paused and looked steadily at his friend. “You’re afraid of an investigation—an impeachment? Well, the letter anticipates that.”

“How, in heaven’s name?”

“By a plain statement of facts. My wife has told me that she did borrow of Fleetwood. He speculated for her and made a considerable sum, out of which she repaid his loan. The ‘Spy’s’ accusation is true. If it can be proved that my wife induced me to appoint Fleetwood, it may be argued that she sold him the appointment. But it can’t be proved, and the ‘Spy’ won’t waste its breath in trying to, because my statement will take the sting out of its innuendoes. I propose to forestall its attack by setting forth the facts in its columns, and asking the public to decide between us. On one side is the private fact that my wife, without my knowledge, borrowed money from Fleetwood just before I appointed him to an important post; on the other side is his public record and mine. I want people to see both sides and judge between them, not in the red glare of a newspaper denunciation but in the plain daylight of common-sense. Charges against the private morality of a public man are usually made in such a blare of headlines and cloud of mud-throwing that the voice he lifts up in his

defence can't make itself heard. In this case I want the public to hear what I have to say before the yelping begins. My letter will take the wind out of the 'Spy's' sails, and if the verdict goes against me the case will have been decided on its own merits and not at the dictation of the writers of scare-heads. Even if I don't gain my end, it will be a good thing, for once, for the public to consider dispassionately how far a private calamity should be allowed to affect a career of public usefulness, and the next man who goes through what I'm undergoing may have cause to thank me if no one else does."

Shackwell sat silent for a moment, the ring of the last words in his ears.

Suddenly he rose and held out his hand. "Give me the letter," he said.

The Governor smiled. "It's all right, then? You see, and you'll take it?"

Shackwell met his glance with one of melancholy interrogation. "I see a magnificent suicide—but it's the kind of way I shouldn't mind dying myself."

He pulled himself silently into his coat and put the letter in one of its pockets: but as he was turning to the door the Governor called after him cheerfully: "By the way, Hadley, aren't you and Mrs. Shackwell giving a big dinner to-morrow?"

Shackwell paused with a look of surprise. "I believe we are—why?"

"Because, if there's room for two more, my wife and I would like to be invited."

Shackwell nodded his assent and turned away without answering. As he came out of the lobby into the sunset radiance he saw a victoria drive up the long sweep to the Capitol and pause before the central portico. He descended the steps, and Mrs. Mornway leaned from her furs to greet him.

"I have called for my husband," she said smiling. "He promised to

get away in time for a little turn in the Park before dinner.”

His Father's Son

AFTER his wife's death Mason Grew took the momentous step of selling out his business and moving from Wingfield, Connecticut, to Brooklyn.

For years he had secretly nursed the hope of such a change, but had never dared to suggest it to Mrs. Grew, a woman of immutable habits. Mr. Grew himself was attached to Wingfield, where he had grown up, prospered, and become what the local press described as "prominent." He was attached to his brick house with sandstone trimmings and a cast-iron area-railing neatly sanded to match; to the similar row of houses across the street, with "trolley" wires forming a kind of aerial pathway between, and to the vista closed by the sandstone steeple of the church which he and his wife had always attended, and where their only child had been baptised.

It was hard to snap all these threads of association, yet still harder, now that he was alone, to live so far from his boy. Ronald Grew was practising law in New York, and there was no more chance of his returning to live at Wingfield than of a river's flowing inland from the sea. Therefore to be near him his father must move; and it was characteristic of Mr. Grew, and of the situation generally, that the translation, when it took place, was to Brooklyn, and not to New York.

"Why you bury yourself in that hole I can't think," had been Ronald's comment; and Mr. Grew simply replied that rents were lower in Brooklyn, and that he had heard of a house there that would suit him. In reality he had said to himself—being the only recipient

of his own confidences—that if he went to New York he might be on the boy's mind; whereas, if he lived in Brooklyn, Ronald would always have a good excuse for not popping over to see him every other day. The sociological isolation of Brooklyn, combined with its geographical nearness, presented in fact the precise conditions that Mr. Grew sought. He wanted to be near enough to New York to go there often, to feel under his feet the same pavement that Ronald trod, to sit now and then in the same theatres, and find on his breakfast-table the journals which, with increasing frequency, inserted Ronald's name in the sacred bounds of the society column. It had always been a trial to Mr. Grew to have to wait twenty-four hours to read that "among those present was Mr. Ronald Grew." Now he had it with his coffee, and left it on the breakfast-table to the perusal of a "hired girl" cosmopolitan enough to do it justice. In such ways Brooklyn attested the advantages of its nearness to New York, while remaining, as regards Ronald's duty to his father, as remote and inaccessible as Wingfield.

It was not that Ronald shirked his filial obligations, but rather because of his heavy sense of them, that Mr. Grew so persistently sought to minimise and lighten them. It was he who insisted, to Ronald, on the immense difficulty of getting from New York to Brooklyn.

"Any way you look at it, it makes a big hole in the day; and there's not much use in the ragged rim left. You say you're dining out next Sunday? Then I forbid you to come over here to lunch. Do you understand me, sir? You disobey at the risk of your father's malediction! Where did you say you were dining? With the Waltham Bankshires again? Why, that's the second time in three weeks, ain't it? Big blow-out, I suppose? Gold plate and orchids—opera singers in afterward? Well, you'd be in a nice box if there was a fog on the river, and you got hung up half-way over. That'd be a handsome return for the attention Mrs. Bankshire has shown you—singling out a whipper-snapper like you twice in three weeks! (What's the

daughter's name—Daisy?) No, *sir*—don't you come fooling round here next Sunday, or I'll set the dogs on you. And you wouldn't find me in anyhow, come to think of it. I'm lunching out myself, as it happens—yes, *sir*, *lunching out*. Is there anything especially comic in my lunching out? I don't often do it, you say? Well, that's no reason why I never should. Who with? Why, with—with old Dr. Bleaker: Dr. Eliphalet Bleaker. No, you wouldn't know about him—he's only an old friend of your mother's and mine."

Gradually Ronald's insistence became less difficult to overcome. With his customary sweetness and tact (as Mr. Grew put it) he began to "take the hint," to give in to "the old gentleman's" growing desire for solitude.

"I'm set in my ways, Ronny, that's about the size of it; I like to go tick-ticking along like a clock. I always did. And when you come bouncing in I never feel sure there's enough for dinner—or that I haven't sent Maria out for the evening. And I don't want the neighbours to see me opening my own door to my son. That's the kind of cringing snob I am. Don't give me away, will you? I want 'em to think I keep four or five powdered flunkeys in the hall day and night—same as the lobby of one of those Fifth Avenue hotels. And if you pop over when you're not expected, how am I going to keep up the bluff?"

Ronald yielded after the proper amount of resistance—his intuitive sense, in every social transaction, of the proper amount of force to be expended, was one of the qualities his father most admired in him. Mr. Grew's perceptions in this line were probably more acute than his son suspected. The souls of short thick-set men, with chubby features, mutton-chop whiskers, and pale eyes peering between folds of fat like almond kernels in half-split shells—souls thus encased do not reveal themselves to the casual scrutiny as delicate emotional instruments. But in spite of the disguise in which he walked Mr. Grew vibrated exquisitely in response to every imaginative appeal; and his son Ronald was always stimulating and feeding his

imagination.

Ronald in fact constituted Mr. Grew's one escape from the element of mediocrity which had always hemmed him in. To a man so enamoured of beauty, and so little qualified to add to its sum total, it was a wonderful privilege to have bestowed on the world such a being. Ronald's resemblance to Mr. Grew's early conception of what he himself would have liked to look might have put new life into the discredited theory of pre-natal influences. At any rate, if the young man owed his beauty, his distinction and his winning manner to the dreams of one of his parents, it was certainly to those of Mr. Grew, who, while outwardly devoting his life to the manufacture and dissemination of Grew's Secure Suspender Buckle, moved in an enchanted inward world peopled with all the figures of romance. In this company Mr. Grew cut as brilliant a figure as any of its noble phantoms; and to see his vision of himself projected on the outer world in the shape of a brilliant popular conquering son, seemed, in retrospect, to give to it a belated reality. There were even moments when, forgetting his face, Mr. Grew said to himself that if he'd had "half a chance" he might have done as well as Ronald; but this only fortified his resolve that Ronald should do infinitely better.

Ronald's ability to do well almost equalled his gift of looking well. Mr. Grew constantly affirmed to himself that the boy was "not a genius"; but, barring this slight deficiency, he had almost every gift that a parent could wish. Even at Harvard he had managed to be several desirable things at once—writing poetry in the college magazine, playing delightfully "by ear," acquitting himself creditably of his studies, and yet holding his own in the sporting set that formed, as it were, the gateway of the temple of Society. Mr. Grew's idealism did not preclude the frank desire that his son should pass through that gateway; but the wish was not prompted by material considerations. It was Mr. Grew's notion that, in the rough and hurrying current of a new civilisation, the little pools of leisure and enjoyment must nurture delicate growths, material graces as well as

moral refinements, likely to be uprooted and swept away by the rush of the main torrent. He based his theory on the fact that he had liked the few “society” people he had met—had found their manners simpler, their voices more agreeable, their views more consonant with his own, than those of the leading citizens of Wingfield. But then he had met very few.

Ronald’s sympathies needed no urging in the same direction. He took naturally, dauntlessly, to all the high and exceptional things about which his father’s imagination had so long ineffectually hovered—from the start he *was* what Mr. Grew had dreamed of being. And so precise, so detailed, was Mr. Grew’s vision of his own imaginary career, that as Ronald grew up, and began to travel in a widening orbit, his father had an almost uncanny sense of the extent to which that career was enacting itself before him. At Harvard, Ronald had done exactly what the hypothetical Mason Grew would have done, had not his actual self, at the same age, been working his way up in old Slagden’s button factory—the institution which was later to acquire fame, and even notoriety, as the birthplace of Grew’s Secure Suspender Buckle. Afterward, at a period when the actual Grew had passed from the factory to the bookkeeper’s desk, his invisible double had been reading law at Columbia—precisely again what Ronald did! But it was when the young man left the paths laid out for him by the parental hand, and cast himself boldly on the world, that his adventures began to bear the most astonishing resemblance to those of the unrealised Mason Grew. It was in New York that the scene of this hypothetical being’s first exploits had always been laid; and it was in New York that Ronald was to achieve his first triumph. There was nothing small or timid about Mr. Grew’s imagination; it had never stopped at anything between Wingfield and the metropolis. And the real Ronald had the same cosmic vision as his parent. He brushed aside with a contemptuous laugh his mother’s entreaty that he should stay at Wingfield and continue the dynasty of the Grew Suspender Buckle. Mr. Grew knew that in reality Ronald

wincing at the Buckle, loathed it, blushed for his connection with it. Yet it was the Buckle that had seen him through Groton, Harvard and the Law School, and had permitted him to enter the office of a distinguished corporation lawyer, instead of being enslaved to some sordid business with quick returns. The Buckle had been Ronald's fairy godmother—yet his father did not blame him for abhorring and disowning it. Mr. Grew himself often bitterly regretted having attached his own name to the instrument of his material success, though, at the time, his doing so had been the natural expression of his romanticism. When he invented the Buckle, and took out his patent, he and his wife both felt that to bestow their name on it was like naming a battle-ship or a peak of the Andes.

Mrs. Grew had never learned to know better; but Mr. Grew had discovered his error before Ronald was out of school. He read it first in a black eye of his boy's. Ronald's symmetry had been marred by the insolent fist of a fourth former whom he had chastised for alluding to his father as "Old Buckles"; and when Mr. Grew heard the epithet he understood in a flash that the Buckle was a thing to blush for. It was too late then to dissociate his name from it, or to efface from the hoardings of the entire continent the picture of two gentlemen, one contorting himself in the abject effort to repair a broken brace, while the careless ease of the other's attitude proclaimed his trust in the Secure Suspender Buckle. These records were indelible, but Ronald could at least be spared all direct connection with them; and that day Mr. Grew decided that the boy should not return to Wingfield.

"You'll see," he had said to Mrs. Grew, "he'll take right hold in New York. Ronald's got my knack for taking hold," he added, throwing out his chest.

"But the way you took hold was in business," objected Mrs. Grew, who was large and literal.

Mr. Grew's chest collapsed, and he became suddenly conscious of his comic face in its rim of sandy whisker. "That's not the only way,"

he said, with a touch of wistfulness which escaped his wife's analysis.

"Well, of course you could have written beautifully," she rejoined with admiring eyes.

"*Written?* Me!" Mr. Grew became sardonic.

"Why, those letters—weren't *they* beautiful, I'd like to know?"

The couple exchanged a glance, innocently allusive and amused on the wife's part, and charged with a sudden tragic significance on the husband's.

"Well, I've got to be going along to the office now," he merely said, dragging himself out of his chair.

This had happened while Ronald was still at school; and now Mrs. Grew slept in the Wingfield cemetery, under a life-size theological virtue of her own choosing, and Mr. Grew's prognostications as to Ronald's ability to "take right hold" in New York were being more and more brilliantly fulfilled.

II

Ronald obeyed his father's injunction not to come to luncheon on the day of the Bankshires' dinner; but in the middle of the following week Mr. Grew was surprised by a telegram from his son.

"Want to see you important matter. Expect me tomorrow afternoon."

Mr. Grew received the telegram after breakfast. To peruse it he had lifted his eye from a paragraph of the morning paper describing a fancy-dress dinner which the Hamilton Gliddens' had given the night before for the house-warming of their new Fifth Avenue palace.

"Among the couples who afterward danced in the Poets' Quadrille were Miss Daisy Bankshire, looking more than usually lovely as Laura, and Mr. Ronald Grew as the young Petrarch."

Petrarch and Laura! Well—if *anything* meant anything, Mr. Grew supposed he knew what that meant. For weeks past he had noticed how constantly the names of the young people were coupled in the

society notes he so insatiably devoured. Even the soulless reporter was getting into the habit of uniting them in his lists. And this Laura and Petrarch business was almost an announcement. . .

Mr. Grew dropped the telegram, wiped his eye-glasses, and re-read the paragraph. "Miss Daisy Bankshire . . . more than usually lovely. . ." Yes; she *was* lovely. He had often seen her photograph in the papers—seen her represented in every attitude of the mundane game: fondling her prize bulldog, taking a fence on her thoroughbred, dancing a *gavotte*, all patches and plumes, or fingering a guitar, all tulles and lilies; and once he had caught a glimpse of her at the theatre. Hearing that Ronald was going to a fashionable first-night with the Bankshires, Mr. Grew had for once overcome his repugnance to following his son's movements, and had secured for himself, under the shadow of the balcony, a stall whence he could observe the Bankshire box without fear of detection. Ronald had never known of his father's presence; and for three blessed hours Mr. Grew had watched his boy's handsome dark head bent above the fair hair and averted shoulder that were all he could catch of Miss Bankshire's beauties.

He recalled the vision now; and with it came, as usual, its ghostly double: the vision of his young self bending above such a shoulder and such shining hair. Needless to say that the real Mason Grew had never found himself in so enviable a situation. The late Mrs. Grew had no more resembled Miss Daisy Bankshire than he had looked like the happy victorious Ronald. And the mystery was that from their dull faces, their dull endearments, the miracle of Ronald should have sprung. It was almost—fantastically—as if the boy had been a changeling, child of a Latmian night, whom the divine companion of Mr. Grew's early reveries had secretly laid in the cradle of the Wingfield bedroom while Mr. and Mrs. Grew slept the sleep of conjugal indifference.

The young Mason Grew had not at first accepted this astral episode as the complete cancelling of his claims on romance. He too had

grasped at the high-hung glory; and, with his tendency to reach too far when he reached at all, had singled out the prettiest girl in Wingfield. When he recalled his stammered confession of love his face still tingled under her cool bright stare. His audacity had struck her dumb; and when she recovered her voice it was to fling a taunt at him.

“Don’t be too discouraged, you know—have you ever thought of trying Addie Wicks?”

All Wingfield would have understood the gibe: Addie Wicks was the dullest girl in town. And a year later he had married Addie Wicks. . .

He looked up from the perusal of Ronald’s telegram with this memory in his mind. Now at last his dream was coming true! His boy would taste of the joys that had mocked his thwarted youth and his dull middle-age. And it was fitting that they should be realised in Ronald’s destiny. Ronald was made to take happiness boldly by the hand and lead it home like a bride. He had the carriage, the confidence, the high faith in his fortune, that compel the wilful stars. And, thanks to the Buckle, he would also have the background of material elegance that became his conquering person. Since Mr. Grew had retired from business his investments had prospered, and he had been saving up his income for just such a purpose. His own wants were few: he had brought the Wingfield furniture to Brooklyn, and his sitting-room was a replica of that in which the long years of his married life had been spent. Even the florid carpet on which Ronald’s first footsteps had been taken was carefully matched when it became too threadbare. And on the marble centre-table, with its beaded cover and bunch of dyed pampas grass, lay the illustrated Longfellow and the copy of Ingersoll’s lectures which represented literature to Mr. Grew when he had led home his bride. In the light of Ronald’s romance, Mr. Grew found himself re-living, with mingled pain and tenderness, all the poor prosaic incidents of his own

personal history. Curiously enough, with this new splendour on them they began to emit a faint ray of their own. His wife's armchair, in its usual place by the fire, recalled her placid unperceiving presence, seated opposite to him during the long drowsy years; and he felt her kindness, her equanimity, where formerly he had only ached at her obtuseness. And from the chair he glanced up at the discoloured photograph on the wall above, with a withered laurel wreath suspended on a corner of the frame. The photograph represented a young man with a poetic necktie and untrammelled hair, leaning against a Gothic chair-back, a roll of music in his hand; and beneath was scrawled a bar of Chopin, with the words: "*Adieu, Adèle.*"

The portrait was that of the great pianist, Fortuné Dolbrowski; and its presence on the wall of Mr. Grew's sitting-room commemorated the only exquisite hour of his life save that of Ronald's birth. It was some time before the latter event, a few months only after Mr. Grew's marriage, that he had taken his wife to New York to hear the great Dolbrowski. Their evening had been magically beautiful, and even Addie, roused from her usual inexpressiveness, had waked into a momentary semblance of life. "I never—I never——" she gasped out when they had regained their hotel bedroom, and sat staring back entranced at the evening's vision. Her large face was pink and tremulous, and she sat with her hands on her knees, forgetting to roll up her bonnet strings and prepare her curl-papers.

"I'd like to *write* him just how I felt—I wisht I knew how!" she burst out in a final effervescence of emotion.

Her husband lifted his head and looked at her.

"Would you? I feel that way too," he said with a sheepish laugh. And they continued to stare at each other through a transfiguring mist of sound.

The scene rose before Mr. Grew as he gazed up at the pianist's photograph. "Well, I owe her that anyhow—poor Addie!" he said, with a smile at the inconsequences of fate. With Ronald's telegram in his hand he was in a mood to count his mercies.

"A clear twenty-five thousand a year: that's what you can tell 'em with my compliments," said Mr. Grew, glancing complacently across the centre-table at his boy.

It struck him that Ronald's gift for looking his part in life had never so completely expressed itself. Other young men, at such a moment, would have been red, damp, tight about the collar; but Ronald's cheek was a shade paler, and the contrast made his dark eyes more expressive.

"A clear twenty-five thousand; yes, sir—that's what I always meant you to have."

Mr. Grew leaned carelessly back, his hands thrust in his pockets, as though to divert attention from the agitation of his features. He had often pictured himself rolling out that phrase to Ronald, and now that it was on his lips he could not control their tremor.

Ronald listened in silence, lifting a hand to his slight moustache, as though he, too, wished to hide some involuntary betrayal of emotion. At first Mr. Grew took his silence for an expression of gratified surprise; but as it prolonged itself it became less easy to interpret.

"I—see here, my boy; did you expect more? Isn't it enough?" Mr. Grew cleared his throat. "Do *they* expect more?" he asked nervously. He was hardly able to face the pain of inflicting a disappointment on Ronald at the very moment when he had counted on putting the final touch to his bliss.

Ronald moved uneasily in his chair and his eyes wandered upward to the laurel-wreathed photograph of the pianist.

"Is it the money, Ronald? Speak out, my boy. We'll see, we'll look round—I'll manage somehow."

"No, no," the young man interrupted, abruptly raising his hand as though to check his father.

Mr. Grew recovered his cheerfulness. "Well, what's the trouble then, if *she's* willing?"

Ronald shifted his position again and finally rose from his seat and

wandered across the room.

“Father,” he said, coming back, “there’s something I’ve got to tell you. I can’t take your money.”

Mr. Grew sat speechless a moment, staring blankly at his son; then he emitted a laugh. “My money? What are you talking about? What’s this about my money? Why, it ain’t *mine*, Ronny; it’s all yours—every cent of it!”

The young man met his tender look with a gesture of tragic refusal.

“No, no, it’s not mine—not even in the sense you mean. Not in any sense. Can’t you understand my feeling so?”

“Feeling so? I don’t know how you’re feeling. I don’t know what you’re talking about. Are you too proud to touch any money you haven’t earned? Is that what you’re trying to tell me?”

“No. It’s not that. You must know——”

Mr. Grew flushed to the rim of his bristling whiskers. “Know? Know *what*? Can’t you speak out?”

Ronald hesitated, and the two faced each other for a long strained moment, during which Mr. Grew’s congested countenance grew gradually pale again.

“What’s the meaning of this? Is it because you’ve done something . . . something you’re ashamed of . . . ashamed to tell me?” he gasped; and walking around the table he laid his hand gently on his son’s shoulder. “There’s nothing you can’t tell me, my boy.”

“It’s not that. Why do you make it so hard for me?” Ronald broke out with passion. “You must have known this was sure to happen sooner or later.”

“Happen? What was sure to hap——?” Mr. Grew’s question wavered on his lip and passed into a tremulous laugh. “Is it something *I’ve* done that you don’t approve of? Is it—is it *the Buckle* you’re ashamed of, Ronald Grew?”

Ronald laughed too, impatiently. “The Buckle? No, I’m not ashamed of the Buckle; not any more than you are,” he returned with

a flush. "But I'm ashamed of all I owe to it—all I owe to you—when—when——" He broke off and took a few distracted steps across the room. "You might make this easier for me," he protested, turning back to his father.

"Make what easier? I know less and less what you're driving at," Mr. Grew groaned.

Ronald's walk had once more brought him beneath the photograph on the wall. He lifted his head for a moment and looked at it; then he looked again at Mr. Grew.

"Do you suppose I haven't always known?"

"Known——?"

"Even before you gave me those letters at the time of my mother's death—even before that, I suspected. I don't know how it began . . . perhaps from little things you let drop . . . you and she . . . and resemblances that I couldn't help seeing . . . in myself . . . How on earth could you suppose I *shouldn't guess*? I always thought you gave me the letters as a way of telling me——"

Mr. Grew rose slowly from his chair. "The letters? Do you mean Dolbrowski's letters?"

Ronald nodded with white lips. "You must remember giving them to me the day after the funeral."

Mr. Grew nodded back. "Of course. I wanted you to have everything your mother valued."

"Well—how could I help knowing after that?"

"Knowing *what*?" Mr. Grew stood staring helplessly at his son. Suddenly his look caught at a clue that seemed to confront it with a deeper difficulty. "You thought—you thought those letters . . . Dolbrowski's letters . . . you thought they meant . . ."

"Oh, it wasn't only the letters. There were so many other signs. My love of music—my—all my feelings about life . . . and art . . . And when you gave me the letters I thought you must mean me to know."

Mr. Grew had grown quiet. His lips were firm, and his small eyes looked out steadily from their creased lids.

“To know that you were Fortuné Dolbrowski’s son?”

Ronald made a mute sign of assent.

“I see. And what did you intend to do?”

“I meant to wait till I could earn my living, and then repay you . . . as far as I can ever repay you . . . for what you’d spent on me . . . But now that there’s a chance of my marrying . . . and that your generosity overwhelms me . . . I’m obliged to speak.”

“I see,” said Mr. Grew again. He let himself down into his chair, looking steadily and not unkindly at the young man. “Sit down too, Ronald. Let’s talk.”

Ronald made a protesting movement. “Is anything to be gained by it? You can’t change me—change what I feel. The reading of those letters transformed my whole life—I was a boy till then: they made a man of me. From that moment I understood myself.” He paused, and then looked up at Mr. Grew’s face. “Don’t imagine that I don’t appreciate your kindness—your extraordinary generosity. But I can’t go through life in disguise. And I want you to know that I have not won Daisy under false pretences——”

Mr. Grew started up with the first expletive Ronald had ever heard on his lips.

“You damned young fool, you, you haven’t *told* her——?”

Ronald raised his head with pride. “Oh, you don’t know her, sir! She thinks no worse of me for knowing my secret. She is above and beyond all such conventional prejudices. She’s *proud* of my parentage——” he straightened his slim young shoulders—— “as I’m proud of it . . . yes, sir, proud of it. . .”

Mr. Grew sank back into his seat with a dry laugh. “Well, you ought to be. You come of good stock. And you’re your father’s son, every inch of you!” He laughed again, as though the humour of the situation grew on him with its closer contemplation.

“Yes, I’ve always felt that,” Ronald murmured, gravely.

“Your father’s son, and no mistake.” Mr. Grew leaned forward. “You’re the son of as big a fool as yourself. And here he sits, Ronald

Grew!"

The young man's colour deepened to crimson; but his reply was checked by Mr. Grew's decisive gesture. "Here he sits, with all your young nonsense still alive in him. Don't you begin to see the likeness? If you don't I'll tell you the story of those letters."

Ronald stared. "What do you mean? Don't they tell their own story?"

"I supposed they did when I gave them to you; but you've given it a twist that needs straightening out." Mr. Grew squared his elbows on the table, and looked at the young man across the gift-books and dyed pampas grass. "I wrote all the letters that Dolbrowski answered."

Ronald gave back his look in frowning perplexity. "*You* wrote them? I don't understand. His letters are all addressed to my mother."

"Yes. And he thought he was corresponding with her."

"But my mother—what did she think?"

Mr. Grew hesitated, puckering his thick lids. "Well, I guess she kinder thought it was a joke. Your mother didn't think about things much."

Ronald continued to bend a puzzled frown on the question. "I don't understand," he reiterated.

Mr. Grew cleared his throat with a nervous laugh. "Well, I don't know as you ever will—*quite*. But this is the way it came about. I had a toughish time of it when I was young. Oh, I don't mean so much the fight I had to put up to make my way—there was always plenty of fight in me. But inside of myself it was kinder lonesome. And the outside didn't attract callers." He laughed again, with an apologetic gesture toward his broad blinking face. "When I went round with the other young fellows I was always the forlorn hope—the one that had to eat the drumsticks and dance with the left-overs. As sure as there was a blighter at a picnic I had to swing her, and feed her, and drive her home. And all the time I was mad after all the things you've got

—poetry and music and all the joy-forever business. So there were the pair of us—my face and my imagination—chained together, and fighting, and hating each other like poison.

“Then your mother came along and took pity on me. It sets up a gawky fellow to find a girl who ain’t ashamed to be seen walking with him Sundays. And I was grateful to your mother, and we got along first-rate. Only I couldn’t say things to her—and she couldn’t answer. Well—one day, a few months after we were married, Dolbrowski came to New York, and the whole place went wild about him. I’d never heard any good music, but I’d always had an inkling of what it must be like, though I couldn’t tell you to this day how I knew. Well, your mother read about him in the papers too, and she thought it’d be the swagger thing to go to New York and hear him play—so we went. . . I’ll never forget that evening. Your mother wasn’t easily stirred up—she never seemed to need to let off steam. But that night she seemed to understand the way I felt. And when we got back to the hotel she said to me: ‘I’d like to tell him how I feel. I’d like to sit right down and write to him.’

“ ‘Would you?’ I said. ‘So would I.’

“There was paper and pens there before us, and I pulled a sheet toward me, and began to write. ‘Is this what you’d like to say to him?’ I asked her when the letter was done. And she got pink and said: ‘I don’t understand it, but it’s lovely.’ And she copied it out and signed her name to it, and sent it.”

Mr. Grew paused, and Ronald sat silent, with lowered eyes.

“That’s how it began; and that’s where I thought it would end. But it didn’t, because Dolbrowski answered. His first letter was dated January 10, 1872. I guess you’ll find I’m correct. Well, I went back to hear him again, and I wrote him after the performance, and he answered again. And after that we kept it up for six months. Your mother always copied the letters and signed them. She seemed to think it was a kinder joke, and she was proud of his answering my letters. But she never went back to New York to hear him, though I

saved up enough to give her the treat again. She was too lazy, and she let me go without her. I heard him three times in New York; and in the spring he came to Wingfield and played once at the Academy. Your mother was sick and couldn't go; so I went alone. After the performance I meant to get one of the directors to take me in to see him; but when the time came, I just went back home and wrote to him instead. And the month after, before he went back to Europe, he sent your mother a last little note, and that picture hanging up there. . ."

Mr. Grew paused again, and both men lifted their eyes to the photograph.

"Is that all?" Ronald slowly asked.

"That's all—every bit of it," said Mr. Grew.

"And my mother—my mother never even spoke to Dolbrowski?"

"Never. She never even saw him but that once in New York at his concert."

The blood crept again to Ronald's face. "Are you sure of that, sir?" he asked in a trembling voice.

"Sure as I am that I'm sitting here. Why, she was too lazy to look at his letters after the first novelty wore off. She copied the answers just to humour me—but she always said she couldn't understand what we wrote."

"But how could you go on with such a correspondence? It's incredible!"

Mr. Grew looked at his son thoughtfully. "I suppose it is, to you. You've only had to put out your hand and get the things I was starving for—music, and good talk, and ideas. Those letters gave me all that. You've read them, and you know that Dolbrowski was not only a great musician but a great man. There was nothing beautiful he didn't see, nothing fine he didn't feel. For six months I breathed his air, and I've lived on it ever since. Do you begin to understand a little now?"

"Yes—a little. But why write in my mother's name? Why make it

appear like a sentimental correspondence?”

Mr. Grew reddened to his bald temples. “Why, I tell you it began that way, as a kinder joke. And when I saw that the first letter pleased and interested him, I was afraid to tell him—I *couldn’t* tell him. Do you suppose he’d gone on writing if he’d ever seen me, Ronny?”

Ronald suddenly looked at him with new eyes. “But he must have thought your letters very beautiful—to go on as he did,” he broke out.

“Well—I did my best,” said Mr. Grew modestly.

Ronald pursued his idea. “Where *are* all your letters, I wonder? Weren’t they returned to you at his death?”

Mr. Grew laughed. “Lord, no. I guess he had trunks and trunks full of better ones. I guess Queens and Empresses wrote to him.”

“I should have liked to see your letters,” the young man insisted.

“Well, they weren’t bad,” said Mr. Grew drily. “But I’ll tell you one thing, Ronny,” he added. Ronald raised his head with a quick glance, and Mr. Grew continued: “I’ll tell you where the best of those letters is—it’s in *you*. If it hadn’t been for that one look at life I couldn’t have made you what you are. Oh, I know you’ve done a good deal of your own making—but I’ve been there behind you all the time. And you’ll never know the work I’ve spared you and the time I’ve saved you. Fortuné Dolbrowski helped me do that. I never saw things in little again after I’d looked at ’em with him. And I tried to give you the big view from the start. . . So that’s what became of my letters.”

Mr. Grew paused, and for a long time Ronald sat motionless, his elbows on the table, his face dropped on his hands. Suddenly Mr. Grew’s touch fell on his shoulder.

“Look at here, Ronald Grew—do you want me to tell you how you’re feeling at this minute? Just a mite let down, after all, at the idea that you ain’t the romantic figure you’d got to think yourself. . . Well, that’s natural enough, too; but I’ll tell you what it proves. It proves you’re my son right enough, if any more proof was needed.

For it's just the kind of fool nonsense I used to feel at your age—and if there's anybody here to laugh at it's myself, and not you. And you can laugh at me just as much as you like. . .”

The Daunt Diana

WHAT'S become of the Daunt Diana? You mean to say you never heard the sequel?"

Ringham Finney threw himself back into his chair with the smile of the collector who has a good thing to show. He knew he had a good listener, at any rate. I don't think much of Ringham's snuff-boxes, but his anecdotes are usually worth while. He's a psychologist astray among *bibelots*, and the best bits he brings back from his raids on Christie's and the Hôtel Drouot are the fragments of human nature he picks up on those historic battle-fields. If his *flair* in enamel had been half as good we should have heard of the Finney collection by this time.

He really has—queer fatuous investigator!—an unusually sensitive touch for the human texture, and the specimens he gathers into his museum of memories have almost always some mark of the rare and chosen. I felt, therefore, that I was really to be congratulated on the fact that I didn't know what had become of the Daunt Diana, and on having before me a long evening in which to learn. I had just led my friend back, after an excellent dinner at Foyot's, to the shabby pleasant sitting-room of my *Rive Gauche* hotel; and I knew that, once I had settled him in a good arm-chair, and put a box of cigars at his elbow, I could trust him not to budge till I had the story.

II

You remember old Neave, of course? Little Humphrey Neave, I mean. We used to see him pottering about Rome years ago. He lived

in two rooms over a wine shop, on polenta and lentils, and prowled among the refuse of the Ripetta whenever he had a few coppers to spend. But you've been out of the collector's world for so long that you may not know what happened to him afterward. . .

He was always a queer chap, Neave; years older than you and me, of course—and even when I first knew him, in my raw Roman days, he produced on me an unusual impression of age and experience. I don't think I've ever known any one who was at once so intelligent and so simple. It's the precise combination that results in romance; and poor little Neave was romantic.

He told me once how he'd come to Rome. He was *originaire* of Mystic, Connecticut—and he wanted to get as far away from it as possible. Rome seemed as far as anything on the same planet could be; and after he'd worried his way through Harvard—with shifts and shavings that you and I can't imagine—he contrived to be sent to Switzerland as tutor to a chap who'd failed in his examinations. With only the Alps between, he wasn't likely to turn back; and he got another fellow to take his pupil home, and struck out on foot for the seven hills.

I'm telling you these early details merely to give you a notion of the man. There was a cool persistency and a head-long courage in his dash for Rome that one wouldn't have guessed in the pottering chap we used to know. Once on the spot, he got more tutoring, managed to make himself a name for coaxing balky youths to take their fences, and was finally able to take up the more congenial task of expounding "the antiquities" to cultured travellers. I call it more congenial—but how it must have seared his soul! Fancy unveiling the sacred scars of Time to ladies who murmur: "Was this *actually* the spot—?" while they absently feel for their hat-pins! He used to say that nothing kept him at it but the exquisite thought of accumulating the *lire* for his collection. For the Neave collection, my dear fellow, began early, began almost with his Roman life, began in a series of little nameless odds and ends, broken trinkets, torn embroideries, the

amputated extremities of maimed marbles: things that even the rag-picker had pitched away when he sifted his haul. But they weren't nameless or meaningless to Neave; his strength lay in his instinct for identifying, putting together, seeing significant relations. He was a regular Cuvier of bric-a-brac. And during those early years, when he had time to brood over trifles and note imperceptible differences, he gradually sharpened his instinct, and made it into the delicate and redoubtable instrument it is. Before he had a thousand francs' worth of *anticaglie* to his name he began to be known as an expert, and the big dealers were glad to consult him. But we're getting no nearer the Daunt Diana. . .

Well, some fifteen years ago, in London, I ran across Neave at Christie's. He was the same little man we'd known, effaced, bleached, indistinct, like a poor "impression"—as unnoticeable as one of his own early finds, yet, like them, with a *quality*, if one had an eye for it. He told me he still lived in Rome, and had contrived, by persistent self-denial, to get a few bits together—"piecemeal, little by little, with fasting and prayer; and I mean the fasting literally!" he said.

He had run over to London for his annual "look-round"—I fancy one or another of the big collectors usually paid his journey—and when we met he was on his way to see the Daunt collection. You know old Daunt was a surly brute, and the things weren't easily seen; but he had heard Neave was in London, and had sent—yes, actually sent!—for him to come and give his opinion on a few bits, including the Diana. The little man bore himself discreetly, but you can imagine how proud he was! In his exultation he asked me to come with him—"Oh, I've the *grandes et petites entrées*, my dear fellow: I've made my conditions—" and so it happened that I saw the first meeting between Humphrey Neave and his fate.

For that collection was his fate: or, one may say, it was embodied in the Diana who was queen and goddess of the realm. Yes—I shall always be glad I was with Neave when he had his first look at the Diana. I see him now, blinking at her through his white lashes, and

stroking his wisp of a moustache to hide a twitch of the muscles. It was all very quiet, but it was the *coup de foudre*. I could see that by the way his hands worked when he turned away and began to examine the other things. You remember Neave's hands—thin and dry, with long inquisitive fingers thrown out like antennæ? Whatever they hold—bronze or lace, enamel or glass—they seem to acquire the very texture of the thing, and to draw out of it, by every finger-tip, the essence it has secreted. Well, that day, as he moved about among Daunt's treasures, the Diana followed him everywhere. He didn't look back at her—he gave himself to the business he was there for—but whatever he touched, he felt her. And on the threshold he turned and gave her his first free look—the kind of look that says: "*You're mine.*"

It amused me at the time—the idea of little Neave making eyes at any of Daunt's belongings. He might as well have coquetted with the Kohinoor. And the same idea seemed to strike him; for as we turned away from the big house in Belgravia he glanced up at it and said, with a bitterness I'd never heard in him: "Good Lord! To think of that lumpy fool having those things to handle! Did you notice his stupid stumps of fingers? I suppose he blunted them gouging nuggets out of gold fields. And in exchange for the nuggets he gets all that in a year—only has to hold out his callous palm to have that ripe sphere of beauty drop into it! That's my idea of heaven—to have a great collection drop into one's hand, as success, or love, or any of the big shining things, suddenly drop on some men. And I've had to worry along for nearly fifty years, saving and paring, and haggling and managing, to get here a bit and there a bit—and not one perfection in the lot! It's enough to poison a man's life."

The outbreak was so unlike Neave that I remember every word of it: remember, too, saying in answer: "But, look here, Neave, you wouldn't take Daunt's hands for yours, I imagine?"

He stared a moment and smiled. "Have all that, and grope my way through it like a blind cave fish? What a question! But the sense that

it's always the blind fish that live in that kind of aquarium is what makes anarchists, sir!" He looked back from the corner of the square, where we had paused while he delivered himself of this remarkable metaphor. "God, I'd like to throw a bomb at that place, and be in at the looting!"

And with that, on the way home, he unpacked his grievance—pulled the bandage off the wound, and showed me the ugly mark it made on his little white soul.

It wasn't the struggling, screwing, stinting, self-denying that galled him—it was the smallness of the result. It was, in short, the old tragedy of the discrepancy between a man's wants and his power to gratify them. Neave's taste was too fine for his means—was like some strange, delicate, capricious animal, that he cherished and pampered and couldn't satisfy.

"Don't you know those little glittering lizards that die if they're not fed on some rare tropical fly? Well, my taste's like that, with one important difference—if it doesn't get its fly, it simply turns and feeds on *me*. Oh, it doesn't die, my taste—worse luck! It gets larger and stronger and more fastidious, and takes a bigger bite of me—that's all."

That was all. Year by year, day by day, he had made himself into this delicate register of perceptions and sensations—as far above the ordinary human faculty of appreciation as some scientific registering instrument is beyond the rough human senses—only to find that the beauty which alone could satisfy him was unattainable, that he was never to know the last deep identification which only possession can give. He had trained himself, in short, to feel, in the rare great thing—such an utterance of beauty as the Daunt Diana, say—a hundred elements of perfection, a hundred *reasons why*, imperceptible, inexplicable even, to the average "artistic" sense; he had reached this point by a long process of discrimination and rejection, the renewed great refusals of the intelligence which perpetually asks more, which will make no pact with its self of yesterday, and is never to be

beguiled from its purpose by the wiles of the next-best-thing. Oh, it's a poignant case, but not a common one; for the next-best-thing usually wins. . .

You see, the worst of Neave's state was the fact of his not being a mere collector, even the collector raised to his highest pitch. The whole thing was blent in him with poetry—his imagination had romanticised the acquisitive instinct, as the religious feeling of the Middle Ages turned passion into love. And yet his could never be the abstract enjoyment of the philosopher who says: "This or that object is really mine because I'm capable of appreciating it." Neave *wanted* what he appreciated—wanted it with his touch and his sight as well as with his brain.

It was hardly a year afterward that, coming back from a long tour in India, I picked up a London paper and read the amazing headline: "Mr. Humphrey Neave buys the Daunt collection. . ." I rubbed my eyes and read again. Yes, it could only be our old friend Humphrey. "An American living in Rome . . . one of our most discerning collectors"; there was no mistaking the description. I bolted out to see the first dealer I could find, and there I had the incredible details. Neave had come into a fortune—two or three million dollars, amassed by an uncle who had a corset-factory, and who had attained wealth as the creator of the Mystic Super-straight. (Corset-factory sounds odd, by the way, doesn't it? One had fancied that the corset was a personal, a highly specialised garment, more or less shaped on the form it was to modify; but, after all, the Tanagras were all made from two or three moulds—and so, I suppose, are the ladies who wear the Mystic Super-straight.)

The uncle had a son, and Neave had never dreamed of seeing a penny of the money; but the son died suddenly, and the father followed, leaving a codicil that gave everything to our friend. Humphrey had to go out to "realise" on the corset-factory; and his description of *that* . . . ! Well, he came back with his money in his

pocket, and the day he landed old Daunt went to smash. It all fitted in like a puzzle. I believe Neave drove straight from Euston to Daunt House: at any rate, within two months the collection was his, and at a price that made the trade sit up. Trust old Daunt for that!

I was in Rome the following spring, and you'd better believe I looked him up. A big porter glared at me from the door of the Palazzo Neave: I had almost to produce my passport to get in. But that wasn't Neave's fault—the poor fellow was so beset by people clamouring to see his collection that he had to barricade himself, literally. When I had mounted the state *Scalone*, and come on him, at the end of half a dozen echoing saloons, in the farthest, smallest *réduit* of the suite, I received the same welcome that he used to give us in his den over the wine shop.

"Well—so you've got her?" I said. For I'd caught sight of the Diana in passing against the bluish blur of an old *verdure*—just the background for her hovering loveliness. Only I rather wondered why she wasn't in the room where he sat.

He smiled. "Yes, I've got her," he returned, more calmly than I had expected.

"And all the rest of the loot?"

"Yes. I had to buy the lump."

"Had to? But you wanted to, didn't you? You used to say it was your idea of heaven—to stretch out your hand and have a great ripe sphere of beauty drop into it. I'm quoting your own words, by the way."

Neave blinked and stroked his seedy moustache. "Oh, yes. I remember the phrase. It's true—it is the last luxury." He paused, as if seeking a pretext for his lack of warmth. "The thing that bothered me was having to move. I couldn't cram all the stuff into my old quarters."

"Well, I should say not! This is rather a better setting."

He got up. "Come and take a look round. I want to show you two or three things—new attributions I've made. I'm doing the catalogue

over.”

The interest of showing me the things seemed to dispel the vague apathy I had felt in him. He grew keen again in detailing his redistribution of values, and above all in convicting old Daunt and his advisers of their repeated aberrations of judgment. “The miracle is that he should have got such things, knowing as little as he did what he was getting. And the egregious asses who bought for him were no better, were worse in fact, since they had all sorts of humbugging wrong reasons for admiring what old Daunt simply coveted because it belonged to some other rich man.”

Never had Neave had so wondrous a field for the exercise of his perfected faculty; and I saw then how in the real, the great collector’s appreciations the keenest scientific perception is suffused with imaginative sensibility, and how it is to the latter undefinable quality that in the last resort he trusts himself.

Nevertheless, I still felt the shadow of that hovering apathy, and he knew I felt it, and was always breaking off to give me reasons for it. For one thing, he wasn’t used to his new quarters—hated their bigness and formality; then the requests to show his things drove him mad. “The women—oh, the women!” he wailed, and interrupted himself to describe a heavy-footed German princess who had marched past his treasures as if she were reviewing a cavalry regiment, applying an unmodulated *Mugneeficent* to everything from the engraved gems to the Hercules torso.

“Not that she was half as bad as the other kind,” he added, as if with a last effort at optimism. “The kind who discriminate and say: ‘I’m not sure if it’s Botticelli or Cellini I mean, but *one of that school*, at any rate.’ And the worst of all are the ones who know—up to a certain point: have the schools, and the dates and the jargon pat, and yet wouldn’t recognise a Phidias if it stood where they hadn’t expected it.”

He had all my sympathy, poor Neave; yet these were trials inseparable from the collector’s lot, and not always without their

secret compensations. Certainly they did not wholly explain my friend's state of mind; and for a moment I wondered if it were due to some strange disillusionment as to the quality of his treasures. But no! the Daunt collection was almost above criticism; and as we passed from one object to another I saw there was no mistaking the genuineness of Neave's pride in his possessions. The ripe sphere of beauty was his, and he had found no flaw in it as yet. . .

A year later came the amazing announcement that the Daunt collection was for sale. At first we all supposed it was a case of weeding out (though how old Daunt would have raged at the thought of anybody's weeding *his* collection!) But no—the catalogue corrected that idea. Every stick and stone was to go under the hammer. The news ran like wildfire from Rome to Berlin, from Paris to London and New York. Was Neave ruined, then? Wrong again—the dealers nosed that out in no time. He was simply selling because he chose to sell; and in due time the things came up at Christie's.

But you may be sure the trade had found an answer to the riddle; and the answer was that, on close inspection, Neave had found the things less good than he had supposed. It was a preposterous answer—but then there was no other. Neave, by this time, was pretty generally acknowledged to have the sharpest *flair* of any collector in Europe, and if he didn't choose to keep the Daunt collection it could be only because he had reason to think he could do better.

In a flash this report had gone the rounds, and the buyers were on their guard. I had run over to London to see the thing through, and it was the queerest sale I ever was at. Some of the things held their own, but a lot—and a few of the best among them—went for half their value. You see, they'd been locked up in old Daunt's house for nearly twenty years, and hardly shown to any one, so that the whole younger generation of dealers and collectors knew of them only by hearsay. Then you know the effect of suggestion in such cases. The undefinable sense we were speaking of is a ticklish instrument, easily

thrown out of gear by a sudden fall of temperature; and the sharpest experts grow shy and self-distrustful when the cold current of depreciation touches them. The sale was a slaughter—and when I saw the Daunt Diana fall at the wink of a little third-rate *brocanteur* from Vienna I turned sick at the folly of my kind.

For my part, I had never believed that Neave had sold the collection because he'd "found it out"; and within a year my incredulity was justified. As soon as the things were put in circulation they were known for the marvels that they are. There was hardly a poor bit in the lot; and my wonder grew at Neave's madness. All over Europe, dealers began to fight for the spoils; and all kinds of stuff were palmed off on the unsuspecting as fragments of the Daunt collection!

Meantime, what was Neave doing? For a long time I didn't hear, and chance kept me from returning to Rome. But one day, in Paris, I ran across a dealer who had captured for a song one of the best Florentine bronzes in the Daunt collection—a marvelous *plaque* of Donatello's. I asked him what had become of it, and he said with a grin: "I sold it the other day," naming a price that staggered me.

"Ye gods! Who paid you that for it?"

His grin broadened, and he answered: "Neave."

"Neave? Humphrey Neave?"

"Didn't you know he was buying back his things?"

"Nonsense!"

"He is, though. Not in his own name—but he's doing it."

And he *was*, do you know—and at prices that would have made a sane man shudder! A few weeks later I ran across his tracks in London, where he was trying to get hold of a Penicaud enamel—another of his scattered treasures. Then I hunted him down at his hotel, and had it out with him.

"Look here, Neave, what are you up to?"

He wouldn't tell me at first: stared and laughed and denied. But I took him off to dine, and after dinner, while we smoked, I happened

to mention casually that I had a pull over the man who had the Penicaud—and at that he broke down and confessed.

“Yes, I’m buying them back, Finney—it’s true.” He laughed nervously, twitching his moustache. And then he let me have the story.

“You know how I’d hungered and thirsted for the *real thing*—you quoted my own phrase to me once, about the ‘ripe sphere of beauty.’ So when I got my money, and Daunt lost his, almost at the same moment, I saw the hand of Providence in it. I knew that, even if I’d been younger, and had had more time, I could never hope, nowadays, to form such a collection as *that*. There was the ripe sphere, within reach; and I took it. But when I got it, and began to live with it, I found out my mistake. The transaction was a *mariage de convenance*—there’d been no wooing, no winning. Each of my little old bits—the rubbish I chucked out to make room for Daunt’s glories—had its own personal history, the drama of my relation to it, of the discovery, the struggle, the capture, the first divine moment of possession. There was a romantic secret between us. And then I had absorbed its beauties one by one, they had become a part of my imagination, they held me by a hundred threads of far-reaching association. And suddenly I had expected to create this kind of personal tie between myself and a roomful of new cold alien presences—things staring at me vacantly from the depths of unknown pasts! Can you fancy a more preposterous hope? Why, my other things, my *own* things had wooed me as passionately as I wooed them: there was a certain little Italian bronze, a little Venus, who had drawn me, drawn me, drawn me, imploring me to rescue her from her unspeakable surroundings in a vulgar bric-a-brac shop at Biarritz, where she shrank out of sight among sham Sèvres and Dutch silver, as one has seen certain women—rare, shy, exquisite—made almost invisible by the vulgar splendours surrounding them. Well! that little Venus, who was just a specious seventeenth century attempt at an ‘antique,’ but who had penetrated me with her

pleading grace, touched me by the easily guessed story of her obscure anonymous origin, was more to me imaginatively—yes! more—than the cold bought beauty of the Daunt Diana. . .”

“The Daunt Diana!” I broke in. “Hold up, Neave—the *Daunt Diana*?”

He smiled contemptuously. “A professional beauty, my dear fellow—expected every head to be turned when she came into a room.”

“Oh, Neave,” I groaned.

“Yes, I know. You’re thinking of what we felt that day we first saw her in London. Many a poor devil has sold his soul as the result of such a first sight! Well, I sold *her* instead. Do you want the truth about her? *Elle était bête à pleurer.*”

He laughed, and turned away with a shrug of disenchantment.

“And so you’re impenitent?” I insisted. “And yet you’re buying some of the things back?”

Neave laughed again, ironically. “I knew you’d find me out and call me to account. Well, yes: I’m buying back.” He stood before me, half sheepish, half defiant. “I’m buying back because there’s nothing else as good in the market. And because I’ve a queer feeling that, this time, they’ll be *mine*. But I’m ruining myself at the game!” he confessed.

It was true: Neave was ruining himself. And he’s gone on ruining himself ever since, till now the job’s pretty nearly done. Bit by bit, year by year, he has gathered in his scattered treasures, at higher prices than the dealers ever dreamed of getting for them. There are fabulous details in the story of his quest. Now and then I ran across him, and was able to help him recover a fragment; and it was touching to see his delight in the moment of reunion. Finally, about two years ago, we met in Paris, and he told me he had got back all the important pieces except the Diana.

“The Diana? But you told me you didn’t care for her.”

“Didn’t care?” He leaned across the restaurant table that divided

us. "Well, no, in a sense I didn't. I wanted her to want me, you see; and she didn't then! Whereas now she's crying to me to come to her. You know where she is?" he broke off.

Yes, I knew: in the centre of Mrs. Willy P. Goldmark's yellow-and-gold drawing-room, under a thousand-candlepower chandelier, with reflectors aimed at her from every point of the compass. I had seen her, wincing and shivering there in her outraged nudity, at one of the Goldmark "crushes." "But you can't get her, Neave," I objected.

"No, I can't get her," he said.

Well, last month I was in Rome, for the first time in six or seven years, and of course I looked about for Neave. The Palazzo Neave was let to some rich Russians, and the new porter didn't know where the proprietor lived. But I got on his trail easily enough, and it led me to a strange old place in the Trastevere, a crevassed black palace turned tenement house, and fluttering with pauper linen. I found Neave under the leads, in two or three cold rooms that smelt of the *cuisine* of all his neighbours: a poor shrunken figure, smaller and shabbier than ever, yet more alive than when we had made the tour of his collection in the Palazzo Neave.

The collection was around him again, not displayed in tall cabinets and on marble tables, but huddled on shelves, perched on chairs, crammed in corners, putting the gleam of bronze, the lustre of marble, the opalescence of old glass, into all the angles of his dim rooms. There they were, the presences that had stared at him down the vistas of Daunt House, and shone in cold transplanted beauty under his own cornices: there they were, gathered about him in humble promiscuity, like superb wild creatures tamed to become the familiars of some harmless wizard.

As we went from bit to bit, as he lifted one piece after another, and held it to the light, I saw in his hands the same tremor that I had noticed when he first handled the same objects at Daunt House. All his life was in his finger-tips, and it seemed to communicate life to

the things he touched. But you'll think me infected by his mysticism if I tell you they gained new beauty while he held them. . .

We went the rounds slowly and reverently; and then, when I supposed our inspection was over, and was turning to take my leave, he opened a door I had not noticed, and showed me into a room beyond. It was a mere monastic cell, scarcely large enough for his narrow bed and the chest which probably held his few clothes; but there, in a niche, at the foot of the bed—there stood the Daunt Diana.

I gasped at the sight and turned to him; and he looked back at me without speaking.

“In the name of magic, Neave, how did you do it?”

He smiled as if from the depths of some secret rapture. “Call it magic, if you like; but I ruined myself doing it,” he said.

I stared at him in silence, breathless with the madness of it; and suddenly, red to the ears, he flung out his confession. “I lied to you that day in London—the day I said I didn't care for her. I always cared—always worshipped—always wanted her. But she wasn't mine then, and I knew it, and she knew it . . . and now at last we understand each other.” He looked at me shyly, and then glanced about the bare room. “The setting isn't worthy of her, I know; she was meant for glories I can't give her; but beautiful things, my dear Finney, like beautiful spirits, live in houses not made with hands. . .”

His face shone with an extraordinary kind of light as he spoke; and I saw he'd got hold of the secret we're all after. No, the setting isn't worthy of her, if you like. The rooms are as shabby and mean as those we used to see him in years ago over the wine shop. I'm not sure they're not shabbier and meaner. But she rules there at last, she shines and hovers there above him, and there at night, I doubt not, comes down from her cloud to give him the Latmian kiss. . .

The Debt

YOU REMEMBER—it's not so long ago—the talk there was about Dredge's "Arrival of the Fittest"? The talk has subsided, but the book of course remains: stands up, in fact, as the tallest thing of its kind since—well, I'd almost said since "The Origin of Species."

I'm not wrong, at any rate, in calling it the most important contribution yet made to the development of the Darwinian theory, or rather to the solution of the awkward problem about which that theory has had to make such a circuit. Dredge's hypothesis will be contested, may one day be disproved; but at least it has swept out of the way all previous conjectures, including of course Lanfear's great attempt; and for our generation of scientific investigators it will serve as the first safe bridge across a murderous black whirlpool.

It's all very interesting—there are few things more stirring to the imagination than that projection of the new hypothesis, light as a cobweb and strong as steel, across the intellectual abyss; but, for an idle observer of human motives, the other, the personal, side of Dredge's case is even more interesting and arresting.

Personal side? You didn't know there was one? Pictured him simply as a thinking machine, a highly specialised instrument of precision, the result of a long series of "adaptations," as his own jargon would put it? Well, I don't wonder—if you've met him. He does give the impression of being something out of his own laboratory: a delicate instrument that reveals wonders to the initiated, but is useless in an ordinary hand.

In his youth it was just the other way. I knew him twenty years

ago, as an awkward lad whom young Archie Lanfear had picked up at college, and brought home for a visit. I happened to be staying at the Lanfears' when the boys arrived, and I shall never forget Dredge's first appearance on the scene. You know the Lanfears always lived very simply. That summer they had gone to Buzzard's Bay, in order that Professor Lanfear should be near the Biological Station at Wood's Holl, and they were picnicking in a kind of sketchy bungalow without any attempt at luxury. But Galen Dredge couldn't have been more awe-struck if he'd been suddenly plunged into a Fifth Avenue ball-room. He nearly knocked his head against the low doorway, and in dodging this peril trod heavily on Mabel Lanfear's foot, and became hopelessly entangled in her mother's draperies—though how he managed it I never knew, for Mrs. Lanfear's dowdy muslins ran to no excess of train.

When the Professor himself came in it was ten times worse, and I saw then that Dredge's emotion was a tribute to the great man's presence. That made the boy interesting, and I began to watch. Archie, always enthusiastic but vague, had said: "Oh, he's a tremendous chap—you'll see—" but I hadn't expected to see quite so early. Lanfear's vision, of course, was sharper than mine; and the next morning he had carried Dredge off to the Biological Station. That was the way it began.

Dredge is the son of a Baptist minister. He comes from East Lethe, New York State, and was working his way through college—waiting at White Mountain hotels in summer—when Archie Lanfear ran across him. There were eight children in the family, and the mother was an invalid. Dredge never had a penny from his father after he was fourteen; but his mother wanted him to be a scholar, and "kept at him," as he put it, in the hope of his going back to "teach school" at East Lethe. He developed slowly, as the scientific mind generally does, and was still adrift about himself and his tendencies when Archie took him down to Buzzard's Bay. But he had read Lanfear's "Utility and Variation," and had always been a patient and curious

observer of nature. And his first meeting with Lanfear explained him to himself. It didn't, however, enable him to explain himself to others, and for a long time he remained, to all but Lanfear, an object of incredulity and conjecture.

"*Why* my husband wants him about——" poor Mrs. Lanfear, the kindest of women, privately lamented to her friends; for Dredge, at that time—they kept him all summer at the bungalow—had one of the most encumbering personalities you can imagine. He was as inexpressive as he is to-day, and yet oddly obtrusive: one of those uncomfortable presences whose silence is an interruption.

The poor Lanfears almost died of him that summer, and the pity of it was that he never suspected it, but continued to lavish on them a floundering devotion as inconvenient as the endearments of a dripping dog. He was full of all sorts of raw enthusiasms, which he forced on any one who would listen when his first shyness had worn off. You can't see him spouting sentimental poetry, can you? Yet I've known him to petrify a whole group of Mrs. Lanfear's callers by suddenly discharging on them, in the strident drawl of his state, "Barbara Frietchie" or "The Queen of the May." His taste in literature was uniformly bad, but very definite, and far more dogmatic than his views on biological questions. In his scientific judgments he showed, even then, a temperance remarkable in one so young; but in literature he was a furious propagandist, aggressive, disputatious, and extremely sensitive to adverse opinion.

Lanfear, of course, had been struck from the first by his gift of observation, and by the fact that his eagerness to learn was offset by his reluctance to conclude. I remember Lanfear's telling me that he had never known a lad of Dredge's age who gave such promise of uniting an aptitude for general ideas with the plodding patience of the observer. Of course when Lanfear talked like that of a young biologist his fate was sealed. There could be no question of Dredge's going back to "teach school" at East Lethe. He must take a course in biology at Columbia, spend his vacations at the Wood's Holl

laboratory, and then, if possible, go to Germany for a year or two.

All this meant his virtual adoption by the Lanfears. Most of Lanfear's fortune went in helping young students to a start, and he devoted a liberal subsidy to Dredge.

"Dredge will be my biggest dividend—you'll see!" he used to say, in the chrysalis days when poor Galen was known to the world of science only as a slouching presence in Mrs. Lanfear's drawing-room. And Dredge, it must be said, took his obligations simply, with the dignity, and quiet consciousness of his own worth, which in such cases saves the beneficiary from abjectness. He seemed to trust himself as fully as Lanfear trusted him.

The comic part of it was that his only idea of making what is known as "a return" was to devote himself to the Professor's family. When I hear pretty women lamenting that they can't coax Professor Dredge out of his laboratory I remember Mabel Lanfear's cry to me: "If Galen would only keep away!" When Mabel fell on the ice and broke her leg, Galen walked seven miles in a blizzard to get a surgeon; but if he did her this service one day in the year, he bored her by being in the way for the other three hundred and sixty-four. One would have imagined at that time that he thought his perpetual presence the greatest gift he could bestow; for, except on the occasion of his fetching the surgeon, I don't remember his taking any other way of expressing his gratitude.

In love with Mabel? Not a bit! But the queer thing was that he *did* have a passion in those days—a blind hopeless passion for Mrs. Lanfear! Yes: I know what I'm saying. I mean Mrs. Lanfear, the Professor's wife, poor Mrs. Lanfear, with her tight hair and her loose shape, her blameless brow and earnest eye-glasses, and her perpetual air of mild misapprehension. I can see Dredge cowering, long and many-jointed, in a small drawing-room chair, one square-toed shoe coiled round an exposed ankle, his knees clasped in a knot of knuckles, and his spectacles perpetually seeking Mrs. Lanfear's eye-glasses. I never knew if the poor lady was aware of the sentiment she

inspired, but her children observed it, and it provoked them to irreverent mirth. Galen was the predestined butt of Mabel and Archie; and secure in their mother's obtuseness, and in her worshipper's timidity, they allowed themselves a latitude of banter that sometimes made their audience shiver. Dredge meanwhile was going on obstinately with his work. Now and then he had fits of idleness, when he lapsed into a state of sulky inertia from which even Lanfear's remonstrances could not rouse him. Once, just before an examination, he suddenly went off to the Maine woods for two weeks, came back, and failed to pass. I don't know if his benefactor ever lost hope; but at times his confidence must have been sorely strained. The queer part of it was that when Dredge emerged from these eclipses he seemed keener and more active than ever. His slowly growing intelligence probably needed its periodical pauses of assimilation; and Lanfear was wonderfully patient.

At last Dredge finished his course and went to Germany; and when he came back he was a new man—was, in fact, the Dredge we all know. He seemed to have shed his encumbering personality, and have come to life as a disembodied intelligence. His fidelity to the Lanfears was unchanged; but he showed it negatively, by his discretions and abstentions. I have an idea that Mabel was less disposed to laugh at him, might even have been induced to softer sentiments; but I doubt if Dredge even noticed the change. As for his ex-goddess, he seemed to regard her as a motherly household divinity, the guardian genius of the darning needle; but on Professor Lanfear he looked with a deepening reverence. If the rest of the family had diminished in his eyes, its head had grown even greater.

II

From that day Dredge's progress continued steadily. If not always perceptible to the untrained eye, in Lanfear's sight it never flagged, and the great man began to associate Dredge with his work, and to lean on him more and more. Lanfear's health was already failing, and

in my confidential talks with him I saw how he counted on Dredge to continue and develop his teachings. If he did not describe the young man as his predestined Huxley, it was because any such comparison between himself and his great predecessors would have been distasteful to him; but he evidently felt that it would be Dredge's part to reveal him to posterity. And the young man seemed at that time to take the same view. When he was not busy about Lanfear's work he was recording their conversations with the diligence of a biographer and the accuracy of a naturalist. Any attempt to question Lanfear's theories or to minimise his achievement, roused in his disciple the only flashes of wrath I have ever seen a scientific discussion provoke in him. In defending his master he became almost as intemperate as in the early period of his literary passions.

Such filial devotion must have been all the more precious to Lanfear because, about that time, it became evident that Archie would never carry on his father's work. He had begun brilliantly, you may remember, by a little paper on *Limulus Polyphemus* that attracted a good deal of notice when it appeared; but gradually his zoological ardour yielded to a passion for the violin, which was followed by a plunge into physics. At present, after a side-glance at the drama, I understand he's devoting what is left of his father's money to archæological explorations in Asia Minor.

"Archie's got a delightful little mind," Lanfear used to say to me, rather wistfully, "but it's just a highly polished surface held up to the show as it passes. Dredge's mind takes in only a bit at a time, but the bit stays, and other bits are joined to it, in a hard mosaic of fact, of which imagination weaves the pattern. I saw just how it would be years ago, when my boy used to take my meaning in a flash, and answer me with clever objections, while Galen disappeared into one of his fathomless silences, and then came to the surface like a dripping retriever, a long way beyond Archie's objections, and with an answer to them in his mouth."

It was about this time that the crowning satisfaction of Lanfear's

career came to him: I mean, of course, John Weyman's gift to Columbia of the Lanfear Laboratory, and the founding, in connection with it, of a chair of Experimental Evolution. Weyman had always taken an interest in Lanfear's work, but no one had supposed that his interest would express itself so magnificently. The honour came to Lanfear at a time when he was fighting an accumulation of troubles: failing health, the money difficulties resulting from his irrepressible generosity, his disappointment about Archie's career, and perhaps also the persistent attacks of the new school of German zoologists.

"If I hadn't Galen I should feel the game was up," he said to me once, in a fit of half-real, half-mocking despondency. "But he'll do what I haven't time to do myself, and what my boy can't do for me."

That meant that he would answer the critics, and triumphantly reaffirm Lanfear's theory, which had been rudely shaken, but not dislodged.

"A scientific hypothesis lasts till there's something else to put in its place. People who want to get across a river will use the old bridge till the new one's built. And I don't see any one who's particularly anxious, in this case, to take a contract for the new one," Lanfear ended; and I remember answering with a laugh: "Not while Horatius Dredge holds the other."

It was generally known that Lanfear had not long to live, and the Laboratory was hardly opened before the question of his successor in the chair of Experimental Evolution began to be a matter of public discussion. It was conceded that whoever followed him ought to be a man of achieved reputation, some one carrying, as the French say, a considerable "baggage." At the same time, even Lanfear's critics felt that he should be succeeded by a man who held his views and would continue his teaching. This was not in itself a difficulty, for German criticism had so far been mainly negative, and there were plenty of good men who, while they questioned the permanent validity of Lanfear's conclusions, were yet ready to accept them for their provisional usefulness. And then there was the added inducement of

the Laboratory! The Columbia Professor of Experimental Evolution has at his disposal the most complete instrument of biological research that modern ingenuity has yet produced; and it's not only in theology or politics *que Paris vaut bien une messe!* There was no trouble about finding a candidate; but the whole thing turned on Lanfear's decision, since it was tacitly understood that, by Weyman's wish, he was to select his successor. And what a cry there was when he selected Galen Dredge!

Not in the scientific world, though. The specialists were beginning to know about Dredge. His remarkable paper on Sexual Dimorphism had been translated into several languages, and a furious polemic had broken out over it. When a young fellow can get the big men fighting over him his future is pretty well assured. But Dredge was only thirty-four, and some people seemed to feel that there was a kind of deflected nepotism in Lanfear's choice.

"If he could choose Dredge he might as well have chosen his own son," I've heard it said; and the irony was that Archie—will you believe it?—actually thought so himself! But Lanfear had Weyman behind him, and when the end came the Faculty at once appointed Galen Dredge to the chair of Experimental Evolution.

For the first two years things went quietly, along accustomed lines. Dredge simply continued the course which Lanfear's death had interrupted. He lectured well even then, with a persuasive simplicity surprising in the inarticulate creature one knew him for. But haven't you noticed that certain personalities reveal themselves only in the more impersonal relations of life? It's as if they woke only to collective contacts, and the single consciousness were an unmeaning fragment to them.

If there was anything to criticise in that first part of the course, it was the avoidance of general ideas, of those brilliant rockets of conjecture that Lanfear's students were used to seeing him fling across the darkness. I remember once saying this to Archie, who, having forgotten his absurd disappointment, had returned to his old

allegiance to Dredge.

“Oh, that’s Galen all over. He doesn’t want to jump into the ring till he has a big swishing knockdown argument in his fist. He’ll wait twenty years if he has to. That’s his strength: he’s never afraid to wait.”

I thought this shrewd of Archie, as well as generous; and I saw the wisdom of Dredge’s course. As Lanfear himself had said, his theory was safe enough till somebody found a more attractive one; and before that day Dredge would probably have accumulated sufficient proof to crystallise the fluid hypothesis.

III

The third winter I was off collecting in Central America, and didn’t get back till Dredge’s course had been going for a couple of months. The very day I turned up in town Archie Lanfear descended on me with a summons from his mother. I was wanted at once at a family council.

I found the Lanfear ladies in a state of explosive distress, which Archie’s own indignation hardly made more intelligible. But gradually I put together their fragmentary charges, and learned that Dredge’s lectures were turning into an organised assault on his master’s doctrine.

“It amounts to just this,” Archie said, controlling his women with the masterful gesture of the weak man. “Galen has simply turned round and betrayed my father.”

“Just for a handful of silver he left us,” Mabel sobbed in parenthesis, while Mrs. Lanfear tearfully cited Hamlet.

Archie silenced them again. “The ugly part of it is that he must have had this up his sleeve for years. He must have known when he was asked to succeed my father what use he meant to make of his opportunity. What he’s doing isn’t the result of a hasty conclusion: it means years of work and preparation.”

Archie broke off to explain himself. He had returned from Europe

the week before, and had learned on arriving that Dredge's lectures were stirring the world of science as nothing had stirred it since Lanfear's "Utility and Variation." And the incredible affront was that they owed their success to the fact of being an attempted refutation of Lanfear's great work.

I own that I was staggered: the case looked ugly, as Archie said. And there was a veil of reticence, of secrecy, about Dredge, that always kept his conduct in a half-light of uncertainty. Of some men one would have said off-hand: "It's impossible!" But one couldn't affirm it of him.

Archie hadn't seen him as yet; and Mrs. Lanfear had sent for me because she wished me to be present at the interview between the two men. The Lanfear ladies had a touching belief in Archie's violence: they thought him as terrible as a natural force. My own idea was that if there were any broken bones they wouldn't be Dredge's; but I was too curious as to the outcome not to be glad to offer my services as moderator.

First, however, I wanted to hear one of the lectures; and I went the next afternoon. The hall was jammed, and I saw, as soon as Dredge appeared, what increased security and ease the sympathy of his audience had given him. He had been clear the year before, now he was also eloquent. The lecture was a remarkable effort: you'll find the gist of it in Chapter VII of "The Arrival of the Fittest." Archie sat at my side in a white rage; he was too intelligent not to measure the extent of the disaster. And I was almost as indignant as he when we went to see Dredge the next day.

I saw at a glance that the latter suspected nothing; and it was characteristic of him that he began by questioning me about my finds, and only afterward turned to reproach Archie for having been back a week without letting him know.

"You know I'm up to my neck in this job. Why in the world didn't you hunt me up before this?"

The question was exasperating, and I could understand Archie's

stammer of wrath.

“Hunt you up? Hunt you up? What the deuce are you made of, to ask me such a question instead of wondering why I’m here now?”

Dredge bent his slow calm scrutiny on his friend’s agitated face; then he turned to me.

“What’s the matter?” he said simply.

“The matter?” shrieked Archie, his fist hovering excitedly above the desk by which he stood; but Dredge, with unwonted quickness, caught the fist as it descended.

“Careful—I’ve got a *Kallima* in that jar there.” He pushed a chair forward, and added quietly: “Sit down.”

Archie, ignoring the gesture, towered pale and avenging in his place; and Dredge, after a moment, took the chair himself.

“The matter?” Archie reiterated. “Are you so lost to all sense of decency and honour that you can put that question in good faith? Don’t you really *know* what’s the matter?”

Dredge smiled slowly. “There are so few things one really *knows*.”

“Oh, damn your scientific hair-splitting! Don’t you know you’re insulting my father’s memory?”

Dredge thoughtfully turned his spectacles from one of us to the other.

“Oh, that’s it, is it? Then you’d better sit down. If you don’t see at once it’ll take some time to make you.”

Archie burst into an ironic laugh.

“I rather think it will!” he retorted.

“Sit down, Archie,” I said, setting the example; and he obeyed, with a gesture that made his consent a protest.

Dredge seemed to notice nothing beyond the fact that his visitors were seated. He reached for his pipe, and filled it with the care which the habit of delicate manipulations gave to all the motions of his long knotty hands.

“It’s about the lectures?” he said.

Archie’s answer was a deep scornful breath.

"You've only been back a week, so you've only heard one, I suppose?"

"It was not necessary to hear even that one. You must know the talk they're making. If notoriety is what you're after——"

"Well, I'm not sorry to make a noise," said Dredge, putting a match to his pipe.

Archie bounded in his chair. "There's no easier way of doing it than to attack a man who can't answer you!"

Dredge raised a sobering hand. "Hold on. Perhaps you and I don't mean the same thing. Tell me first what's in your mind."

The question steadied Archie, who turned on Dredge a countenance really eloquent with filial indignation.

"It's an odd question for you to ask; it makes me wonder what's in *yours*. Not much thought of my father, at any rate, or you couldn't stand in his place and use the chance he's given you to push yourself at his expense."

Dredge received this in silence, puffing slowly at his pipe.

"Is that the way it strikes you?" he asked at length.

"God! It's the way it would strike most men."

He turned to me. "You too?"

"I can see how Archie feels," I said.

"That I am attacking his father's memory to glorify myself?"

"Well, not precisely: I think what he really feels is that, if your convictions didn't permit you to continue his father's teaching, you might perhaps have done better to sever your connection with the Lanfear lectureship."

"Then you and he regard the Lanfear lectureship as having been founded to perpetuate a dogma, not to try and get at the truth?"

"Certainly not," Archie broke in. "But there's a question of taste, of delicacy, involved in the case that can't be decided on abstract principles. We know as well as you that my father meant the laboratory and the lectureship to serve the ends of science, at whatever cost to his own special convictions; what we feel—and you

don't seem to—is that you're the last man to put them to that particular use; and I don't want to remind you why."

A slight redness rose through Dredge's sallow skin. "You needn't," he said. "It's because he pulled me out of my hole, woke me up, made me, shoved me off from the shore. Because he saved me ten or twenty years of muddled effort, and put me where I am at an age when my best working years are still ahead of me. Every one knows that's what your father did for me, but I'm the only person who knows the time and trouble it took."

It was well said, and I glanced quickly at Archie, who was never closed to generous emotions.

"Well, then——?" he said, flushing also.

"Well, then," Dredge continued, his voice deepening and losing its nasal edge, "I had to pay him back, didn't I?"

The sudden drop flung Archie back on his prepared attitude of irony. "It would be the natural inference—with most men."

"Just so. And I'm not so very different. I knew your father wanted a successor—some one who'd try and tie up the loose ends. And I took the lectureship with that object."

"And you're using it to tear the whole fabric to pieces!"

Dredge paused to re-light his pipe. "Looks that way," he conceded. "This year anyhow."

"*This year*——?" Archie echoed.

"Yes. When I took up the job I saw it just as your father left it. Or rather, I didn't see any other way of going on with it. The change came gradually, as I worked."

"Gradually? So that you had time to look round you, to know where you were, to see that you were fatally committed to undoing the work he had done?"

"Oh, yes—I had time," Dredge conceded.

"And yet you kept the chair and went on with the course?"

Dredge refilled his pipe, and then turned in his seat so that he looked squarely at Archie.

"What would your father have done in my place?" he asked.

"In your place——?"

"Yes: supposing he'd found out the things I've found out in the last year or two. You'll see what they are, and how much they count, if you'll run over the report of the lectures. If your father'd been alive he might have come across the same facts just as easily."

There was a silence which Archie at last broke by saying: "But he didn't, and you did. There's the difference."

"The difference? What difference? Would your father have suppressed the facts if he'd found them? It's *you* who insult his memory by implying it! And if I'd brought them to him, would he have used his hold over me to get me to suppress them?"

"Certainly not. But can't you see it's his death that makes the difference? He's not here to defend his case."

Dredge laughed, but not unkindly. "My dear Archie, your father wasn't one of the kind who bother to defend their case. Men like him are the masters, not the servants, of their theories. They respect an idea only as long as it's of use to them; when its usefulness ends they chuck it out. And that's what your father would have done."

Archie reddened. "Don't you assume a good deal in taking it for granted that he would have had to do so in this particular case?"

Dredge reflected. "Yes: I was going too far. Each of us can only answer for himself. But to my mind your father's theory is refuted."

"And you don't hesitate to be the man to do it?"

"Should I have been of any use if I had? And did your father ever ask anything of me but to be of as much use as I could?"

It was Archie's turn to reflect. "No. That was what he always wanted, of course."

"That's the way I've always felt. The first day he took me away from East Lethe I knew the debt I was piling up against him, and I never had any doubt as to how I'd pay it, or how he'd want it paid. He didn't pick me out and train me for any object but to carry on the light. Do you suppose he'd have wanted me to snuff it out because it

happened to light up a fact *he* didn't fancy? I'm using *his* oil to feed my torch with: yes, but it isn't really his torch or mine, or his oil or mine: they belong to each of us till we drop and hand them on."

Archie turned a sobered glance on him. "I see your point. But if the job had to be done I don't see that you need have done it from his chair."

"There's where we differ. If I did it at all I had to do it in the best way, and with all the authority his backing gave me. If I owe your father anything, I owe him that. It would have made him sick to see the job badly done. And don't you see that the way to honour him, and show what he's done for science, was to spare no advantage in my attack on him—that I'm proving the strength of his position by the desperateness of my assault?" Dredge paused and squared his lounging shoulders. "After all," he added, "he's not down yet, and if I leave him standing I guess it'll be some time before anybody else cares to tackle him."

There was a silence between the two men; then Dredge continued in a lighter tone: "There's one thing, though, that we're both in danger of forgetting: and that is how little, in the long run, it all counts either way." He smiled a little at Archie's indignant gesture. "The most we can any of us do—even by such a magnificent effort as your father's—is to turn the great marching army a hair's breadth nearer what seems to us the right direction; if one of us drops out, here and there, the loss of headway's hardly perceptible. And that's what I'm coming to now."

He rose from his seat, and walked across to the hearth; then, cautiously resting his shoulder-blades against the mantel-shelf jammed with miscellaneous specimens, he bent his musing spectacles on Archie.

"Your father would have understood why I've done what I'm doing; but that's no reason why the rest of you should. And I rather think it's the rest of you who've suffered most from me. He always knew what I was *there for*, and that must have been some comfort

even when I was most in the way; but I was just an ordinary nuisance to you and your mother and Mabel. You were all too kind to let me see it at the time, but I've seen it since, and it makes me feel that, after all, the settling of this matter lies with you. If it hurts you to have me go on with my examination of your father's theory, I'm ready to drop the lectures to-morrow, and trust to the Lanfear Laboratory to breed up a young chap who'll knock us both out in time. You've only got to say the word."

There was a pause while Dredge turned and laid his extinguished pipe carefully between a jar of embryo sea-urchins and a colony of regenerating planarians.

Then Archie rose and held out his hand.

"No," he said simply; "go on."

Full Circle

GEOFFREY BETTON woke rather late—so late that the winter sunlight sliding across his bedroom carpet struck his eyes as he turned on the pillow.

Strett, the valet, had been in, drawn the bath in the adjoining dressing-room, placed the crystal and silver cigarette-box at his side, put a match to the fire, and thrown open the windows to the bright morning air. It brought in, on the glitter of sun, all the crisp morning noises—those piercing notes of the American thoroughfare that seem to take a sharper vibration from the clearness of the medium through which they pass.

Betton raised himself languidly. That was the voice of Fifth Avenue below his windows. He remembered that, when he moved into his rooms eighteen months before, the sound had been like music to him: the complex orchestration to which the tune of his new life was set. Now it filled him with disgust and weariness, since it had become the symbol of the hurry and noise of that new life. He had been far less hurried in the old days when he had to be up at seven, and down at the office sharp at nine. Now that he got up when he chose, and his life had no fixed framework of duties, the hours hunted him like a pack of blood-hounds.

He dropped back on his pillow with a groan. Yes—not a year ago there had been a positively sensuous joy in getting out of bed, feeling under his bare feet the softness of the warm red carpet, and entering the shining sanctuary where his great porcelain bath proffered its renovating flood. But then a year ago he could still call up the horror

of the communal plunge at his earlier lodgings: the listening for other bathers, the dodging of shrouded ladies in “crimping”-pins, the cold wait on the landing, the descent into a blotchy tin bath, and the effort to identify one’s soap and nail-brush among the promiscuous implements of ablution. That memory had faded now, and Betton saw only the dark hours to which his tiled temple of refreshment formed a kind of glittering antechamber. For after his bath came his breakfast, and on the breakfast tray his letters. His letters!

He remembered—and *that* memory had not faded!—the thrill with which, in the early days of his celebrity, he had opened the first missive in a strange feminine hand: the letter beginning: “I wonder if you’ll mind an unknown reader’s telling you all that your book has been to her?”

Mind? Ye gods, he minded now! For more than a year after the publication of “Diadems and Faggots” the letters, the inane indiscriminate letters of commendation, of criticism, of interrogation, had poured in on him by every post. Hundreds of unknown readers had told him with unsparing detail all that his book had been to them. And the wonder of it was, when all was said and done, that it had really been so little—that when their thick broth of praise was strained through the author’s searching vanity there remained to him so small a sediment of definite specific understanding! No—it was always the same thing, over and over and over again—the same vague gush of adjectives, the same incorrigible tendency to estimate his effort according to each writer’s personal preferences, instead of regarding it as a work of art, a thing to be measured by fixed standards!

He smiled to think how little, at first, he had felt the vanity of it all. He had found a savour even in the grosser evidences of popularity: the advertisements of his book, the daily shower of “clippings,” the sense that, when he entered a restaurant or a theatre, people nudged each other and said “That’s Betton.” Yes, the publicity had been sweet to him—at first. He had been touched by the

sympathy of his fellow-men: had thought indulgently of the world, as a better place than the failures and the dyspeptics would acknowledge. And then his success began to submerge him: he gasped under the thickening shower of letters. His admirers were really unappeasable. And they wanted him to do such ridiculous things—to give lectures, to head movements, to be tendered receptions, to speak at banquets, to address mothers, to plead for orphans, to go up in balloons, to lead the struggle for sterilised milk. They wanted his photograph for literary supplements, his autograph for charity bazaars, his name on committees, literary, educational, and social; above all, they wanted his opinion on everything: on Christianity, Buddhism, tight lacing, the drug habit, democratic government, female suffrage and love. Perhaps the chief benefit of this demand was his incidentally learning from it how few opinions he really had: the only one that remained with him was a rooted horror of all forms of correspondence. He had been unspeakably thankful when the letters began to fall off.

“Diadems and Faggots” was now two years old, and the moment was at hand when its author might have counted on regaining the blessed shelter of oblivion—if only he had not written another book! For it was the worst part of his plight that the result of his first folly had goaded him to the perpetration of the next—that one of the incentives (hideous thought!) to his new work had been the desire to extend and perpetuate his popularity. And this very week the book was to come out, and the letters, the cursed letters, would begin again!

Wistfully, almost plaintively, he looked at the breakfast-tray with which Strett presently appeared. It bore only two notes and the morning journals, but he knew that within the week it would groan under its epistolary burden. The very newspapers flung the fact at him as he opened them.

GEOFFREY BETTON'S NEW NOVEL

ABUNDANCE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "DIADEMS AND FAGGOTS."

FIRST EDITION OF ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY THOUSAND

ALREADY SOLD OUT.

ORDER NOW.

A hundred and fifty thousand volumes! And an average of three readers to each! Half a million of people would be reading him within a week, and every one of them would write to him, and their friends and relations would write too. He laid down the paper with a shudder.

The two notes looked harmless enough, and the caligraphy of one was vaguely familiar. He opened the envelope and looked at the signature: *Duncan Vyse*. He had not seen the name in years—what on earth could Duncan Vyse have to say? He ran over the page and dropped it with a wondering exclamation, which the watchful Strett, re-entering, met by a tentative "Yes, sir?"

"Nothing. Yes—that is——" Betton picked up the note. "There's a gentleman, a Mr. Vyse, coming at ten."

Strett glanced at the clock. "Yes, sir. You'll remember that ten was the hour you appointed for the secretaries to call, sir."

Betton nodded. "I'll see Mr. Vyse first. My clothes, please."

As he got into them, in the state of nervous hurry that had become almost chronic with him, he continued to think about Duncan Vyse. They had seen a great deal of each other for the few years after both had left Harvard: the hard happy years when Betton had been grinding at his business and Vyse—poor devil!—trying to write. The novelist recalled his friend's attempts with a smile; then the memory of one small volume came back to him. It was a novel: "The Lifted Lamp." There was stuff in that, certainly. He remembered Vyse's tossing it down on his table with a gesture of despair when it came back from the last publisher. Betton, taking it up indifferently, had

sat riveted till daylight. When he ended, the impression was so strong that he said to himself: "I'll tell Apthorn about it—I'll go and see him to-morrow." His own secret literary yearnings increased his desire to champion Vyse, to see him triumph over the dulness and timidity of the publishers. Apthorn was the youngest of the guild, still capable of opinions and the courage of them, a personal friend of Betton's, and, as it happened, the man afterward to become known as the privileged publisher of "Diadems and Faggots." Unluckily the next day something unexpected turned up, and Betton forgot about Vyse and his manuscript. He continued to forget for a month, and then came a note from Vyse, who was ill, and wrote to ask what his friend had done. Betton did not like to say "I've done nothing," so he left the note unanswered, and vowed again: "I'll see Apthorn."

The following day he was called to the West on business, and was away a month. When he came back, there was a third note from Vyse, who was still ill, and desperately hard up. "I'll take anything for the book, if they'll advance me two hundred dollars." Betton, full of compunction, would gladly have advanced the sum himself; but he was hard up too, and could only swear inwardly: "I'll write to Apthorn." Then he glanced again at the manuscript, and reflected: "No—there are things in it that need explaining. I'd better see him."

Once he went so far as to telephone Apthorn, but the publisher was out. Then he finally and completely forgot.

One Sunday he went out of town, and on his return, rummaging among the papers on his desk, he missed "The Lifted Lamp," which had been gathering dust there for half a year. What the deuce could have become of it? Betton spent a feverish hour in vainly increasing the disorder of his documents, and then bethought himself of calling the maidservant, who first indignantly denied having touched anything ("I can see that's true from the dust," Betton scathingly remarked), and then mentioned with hauteur that a young lady had called in his absence and asked to be allowed to get a book.

“A lady? Did you let her come up?”

“She said somebody’d sent her.”

Vyse, of course—Vyse had sent her for his manuscript! He was always mixed up with some woman, and it was just like him to send the girl of the moment to Betton’s lodgings, with instructions to force the door in his absence. Vyse had never been remarkable for delicacy. Betton, furious, glanced over his table to see if any of his own effects were missing—one couldn’t tell, with the company Vyse kept!—and then dismissed the matter from his mind, with a vague sense of magnanimity in doing so. He felt himself exonerated by Vyse’s conduct.

The sense of magnanimity was still uppermost when the valet opened the door to announce “Mr. Vyse,” and Betton, a moment later, crossed the threshold of his pleasant library.

His first thought was that the man facing him from the hearth-rug was the very Duncan Vyse of old: small, starved, bleached-looking, with the same sidelong movements, the same air of anæmic truculence. Only he had grown shabbier, and bald.

Betton held out a hospitable hand.

“This is a good surprise! Glad you looked me up, my dear fellow.”

Vyse’s palm was damp and bony: he had always had a disagreeable hand.

“You got my note? You know what I’ve come for?”

“About the secretaryship? (Sit down.) Is that really serious?”

Betton lowered himself luxuriously into one of his vast Maple arm-chairs. He had grown stouter in the last year, and the cushion behind him fitted comfortably into the crease of his nape. As he leaned back he caught sight of his image in the mirror between the windows, and reflected uneasily that Vyse would not find *him* unchanged.

“Serious?” Vyse rejoined. “Why not? Aren’t *you*?”

“Oh, perfectly.” Betton laughed apologetically. “Only—well, the fact is, you may not understand what rubbish a secretary of mine would have to deal with. In advertising for one I never imagined—I

didn't aspire to any one above the ordinary hack."

"I'm the ordinary hack," said Vyse drily.

Betton's affable gesture protested. "My dear fellow——. You see it's not business—what I'm in now," he continued with a laugh.

Vyse's thin lips seemed to form a noiseless "*Isn't it?*" which they instantly transposed into the audible reply: "I judged from your advertisement that you want some one to relieve you in your literary work. Dictation, short-hand—that kind of thing?"

"Well, no: not that either. I type my own things. What I'm looking for is somebody who won't be above tackling my correspondence."

Vyse looked slightly surprised. "I should be glad of the job," he then said.

Betton began to feel a vague embarrassment. He had supposed that such a proposal would be instantly rejected. "It would be only for an hour or two a day—if you're doing any writing of your own?" he threw out interrogatively.

"No. I've given all that up. I'm in an office now—business. But it doesn't take all my time, or pay enough to keep me alive."

"In that case, my dear fellow—if you could come every morning; but it's mostly awful bosh, you know," Betton again broke off, with growing awkwardness.

Vyse glanced at him humorously. "What you want me to write?"

"Well, that depends——" Betton sketched the obligatory smile. "But I was thinking of the letters you'll have to answer. Letters about my books, you know—I've another one appearing next week. And I want to be beforehand now—dam the flood before it swamps me. Have you any idea of the deluge of stuff that people write to a successful novelist?"

As Betton spoke, he saw a tinge of red on Vyse's thin cheek, and his own reflected it in a richer glow of shame. "I mean—I mean——" he stammered helplessly.

"No, I haven't," said Vyse; "but it will be awfully jolly finding out."

There was a pause, groping and desperate on Betton's part,

sardonically calm on his visitor's.

"You—you've given up writing altogether?" Betton continued.

"Yes; we've changed places, as it were." Vyse paused. "But about these letters—you dictate the answers?"

"Lord, no! That's the reason why I said I wanted somebody—er—well used to writing. I don't want to have anything to do with them—not a thing! You'll have to answer them as if they were written to *you*——" Betton pulled himself up again, and rising in confusion jerked open one of the drawers of his writing-table.

"Here—this kind of rubbish," he said, tossing a packet of letters onto Vyse's knee.

"Oh—you keep them, do you?" said Vyse simply.

"I—well—some of them; a few of the funniest only."

Vyse slipped off the band and began to open the letters. While he was glancing over them Betton again caught his own reflection in the glass, and asked himself what impression he had made on his visitor. It occurred to him for the first time that his high-coloured well-fed person presented the image of commercial rather than of intellectual achievement. He did not look like his own idea of the author of "Diadems and Faggots"—and he wondered why.

Vyse laid the letters aside. "I think I can do it—if you'll give me a notion of the tone I'm to take."

"The tone?"

"Yes—that is, if you expect me to sign your name."

"Oh, of course you're to sign for me. As for the tone, say just what you'd—well, say all you can without encouraging them to answer."

Vyse rose from his seat. "I could submit a few specimens," he suggested.

"Oh, as to that—you always wrote better than I do," said Betton handsomely.

"I've never had this kind of thing to write. When do you wish me to begin?" Vyse inquired, ignoring the tribute.

"The book's out on Monday. The deluge will probably begin about

three days after. Will you turn up on Thursday at this hour?" Betton held his hand out with real heartiness. "It was great luck for me, your striking that advertisement. Don't be too harsh with my correspondents—I owe them something for having brought us together."

II

The deluge began punctually on the Thursday, and Vyse, arriving as punctually, had an impressive pile of letters to attack. Betton, on his way to the Park for a ride, came into the library, smoking the cigarette of indolence, to look over his secretary's shoulder.

"How many of 'em? Twenty? Good Lord! It's going to be worse than 'Diadems.' I've just had my first quiet breakfast in two years—time to read the papers and loaf. How I used to dread the sight of my letter-box! Now I shan't know that I have one."

He leaned over Vyse's chair, and the secretary handed him a letter.

"Here's rather an exceptional one—lady, evidently. I thought you might want to answer it yourself——"

"Exceptional?" Betton ran over the mauve pages and tossed them down. "Why, my dear man, I get hundreds like that. You'll have to be pretty short with her, or she'll send her photograph."

He clapped Vyse on the shoulder and turned away, humming a tune. "Stay to luncheon," he called back gaily from the threshold.

After luncheon Vyse insisted on showing a few of his answers to the first batch of letters. "If I've struck the note I won't bother you again," he urged; and Betton groaningly consented.

"My dear fellow, they're beautiful—too beautiful. I'll be let in for a correspondence with every one of these people."

Vyse, in reply, mused for a while above a blank sheet. "All right—how's this?" he said, after another interval of rapid writing.

Betton glanced over the page. "By George—by George! Won't she see it?" he exulted, between fear and rapture.

"It's wonderful how little people see," said Vyse reassuringly.

The letters continued to pour in for several weeks after the appearance of "Abundance." For five or six blissful days Betton did not even have his mail brought to him, trusting to Vyse to single out his personal correspondence, and to deal with the rest of the letters according to their agreement. During those days he luxuriated in a sense of wild and lawless freedom; then, gradually, he began to feel the need of fresh restraints to break, and learned that the zest of liberty lies in the escape from specific obligations. At first he was conscious only of a vague hunger, but in time the craving resolved itself into a shame-faced desire to see his letters.

"After all, I hated them only because I had to answer them"; and he told Vyse carelessly that he wished all his letters submitted to him before the secretary answered them.

The first morning he pushed aside those beginning: "I have just laid down 'Abundance' after a third reading," or: "Every day for the last month I have been telephoning my bookseller to know when your novel would be out." But little by little the freshness of his interest revived, and even this stereotyped homage began to arrest his eye. At last a day came when he read all the letters, from the first word to the last, as he had done when "Diadems and Faggots" appeared. It was really a pleasure to read them, now that he was relieved of the burden of replying: his new relation to his correspondents had the glow of a love-affair unchilled by the contingency of marriage.

One day it struck him that the letters were coming in more slowly and in smaller numbers. Certainly there had been more of a rush when "Diadems and Faggots" came out. Betton began to wonder if Vyse were exercising an unauthorised discrimination, and keeping back the communications he deemed least important. This conjecture carried the novelist straight to his library, where he found Vyse bending over the writing-table with his usual inscrutable pale smile. But once there, Betton hardly knew how to frame his question, and blundered into an inquiry for a missing invitation.

"There's a note—a personal note—I ought to have had this morning. Sure you haven't kept it back by mistake among the others?"

Vyse laid down his pen. "The others? But I never keep back any."

Betton had foreseen the answer. "Not even the worst twaddle about my book?" he suggested lightly, pushing the papers about.

"Nothing. I understood you wanted to go over them all first."

"Well, perhaps it's safer," Betton conceded, as if the idea were new to him. With an embarrassed hand he continued to turn over the letters at Vyse's elbow.

"Those are yesterday's," said the secretary; "here are today's," he added, pointing to a meagre trio.

"H'm—only these?" Betton took them and looked them over lingeringly. "I don't see what the deuce that chap means about the first part of 'Abundance' 'certainly justifying the title'—do you?"

Vyse was silent, and the novelist continued irritably: "Damned cheek, his writing, if he doesn't like the book. Who cares what he thinks about it, anyhow?"

And his morning ride was embittered by the discovery that it was unexpectedly disagreeable to have Vyse read any letters which did not express unqualified praise of his books. He began to fancy that there was a latent rancour, a kind of baffled sneer, under Vyse's manner; and he decided to return to the practice of having his mail brought straight to his room. In that way he could edit the letters before his secretary saw them.

Vyse made no comment on the change, and Betton was reduced to wondering whether his imperturbable composure were the mask of complete indifference or of a watchful jealousy. The latter view being more agreeable to his employer's self-esteem, the next step was to conclude that Vyse had not forgotten the episode of "The Lifted Lamp," and would naturally take a vindictive joy in any unfavourable judgments passed on his rival's work. This did not simplify the situation, for there was no denying that unfavourable

criticisms preponderated in Betton's correspondence. "Abundance" was neither meeting with the unrestricted welcome of "Diadems and Faggots," nor enjoying the alternative of an animated controversy: it was simply found dull, and its readers said so in language not too tactfully tempered by comparisons with its predecessor. To withhold unfavourable comments from Vyse was, therefore, to make it appear that correspondence about the book had died out; and its author, mindful of his unguarded predictions, found this even more embarrassing. The simplest solution would be to get rid of Vyse; and to this end Betton began to address his energies.

One evening, finding himself unexpectedly disengaged, he asked Vyse to dine; it had occurred to him that, in the course of an after-dinner chat, he might hint his feeling that the work he had offered his friend was unworthy so accomplished a hand.

Vyse surprised him by a momentary hesitation. "I may not have time to dress."

Betton brushed the objection aside. "What's the odds? We'll dine here—and as late as you like."

Vyse thanked him, and appeared, punctually at eight, in all the shabbiness of his daily wear. He looked paler and more shyly truculent than usual, and Betton, from the height of his florid stature, said to himself, with the sudden professional instinct for "type": "He might be an agent of something—a chap who carries deadly secrets."

Vyse, it was to appear, did carry a deadly secret; but one less perilous to society than to himself. He was simply poor—unpardonably, irremediably poor. Everything failed him, had always failed him: whatever he put his hand to went to bits.

This was the confession that, reluctantly, yet with a kind of white-lipped bravado, he flung at Betton in answer to the latter's tentative suggestion that, really, the letter-answering job wasn't worth bothering him with—a thing that any typewriter could do.

"If you mean that you're paying me more than it's worth, I'll take less," Vyse rushed out after a pause.

“Oh, my dear fellow——” Betton protested, flushing. “What *do* you mean, then? Don’t I answer the letters as you want them answered?”

Betton anxiously stroked his silken ankle. “You do it beautifully, too beautifully. I mean what I say: the work’s not worthy of you. I’m ashamed to ask you——”

“Oh, hang shame,” Vyse interrupted. “Do you know why I said I shouldn’t have time to dress tonight? Because I haven’t any evening clothes. As a matter of fact, I haven’t much but the clothes I stand in. One thing after another’s gone against me; all the infernal ingenuities of chance. It’s been a slow Chinese torture, the kind where they keep you alive to have more fun killing you.” He straightened himself with a sudden blush. “Oh, I’m all right now—getting on capitally. But I’m still walking rather a narrow plank; and if I do your work well enough—if I take your idea——”

Betton stared into the fire without answering. He knew next to nothing of Vyse’s history, of the mischance or mismanagement that had brought him, with his brains and his training, to so unlikely a pass. But a pang of compunction shot through him as he remembered the manuscript of “The Lifted Lamp” gathering dust on his table for half a year.

“Not that it would have made any earthly difference—since he’s evidently never been able to get the thing published.” But this reflection did not wholly console Betton, and he found it impossible, at the moment, to tell Vyse that his services were not needed.

III

During the ensuing weeks the letters grew fewer and fewer, and Betton foresaw the approach of the fatal day when his secretary, in common decency, would have to say: “I can’t draw my pay for doing nothing.”

What a triumph for Vyse!

The thought was intolerable, and Betton cursed his weakness in not having dismissed the fellow before such a possibility arose.

"If I tell him I've no use for him now, he'll see straight through it, of course;—and then, hang it, he looks so poor!"

This consideration came after the other, but Betton, in rearranging them, put it first, because he thought it looked better there, and also because he immediately perceived its value in justifying a plan of action that was beginning to take shape in his mind.

"Poor devil, I'm damned if I don't do it for him!" said Betton, sitting down at his desk.

Three or four days later he sent word to Vyse that he didn't care to go over the letters any longer, and that they would once more be carried directly to the library.

The next time he lounged in, on his way to his morning ride, he found his secretary's pen in active motion.

"A lot to-day," Vyse told him cheerfully.

His tone irritated Betton: it had the inane optimism of the physician reassuring a discouraged patient.

"Oh. Lord—I thought it was almost over," groaned the novelist.

"No: they've just got their second wind. Here's one from a Chicago publisher—never heard the name—offering you thirty per cent. on your next novel, with an advance royalty of twenty thousand. And here's a chap who wants to syndicate it for a bunch of Sunday papers: big offer, too. That's from Ann Arbor. And this—oh, *this* one's funny!"

He held up a small scented sheet to Betton, who made no movement to receive it.

"Funny? Why's it funny?" he growled.

"Well, it's from a girl—a lady—and she thinks she's the only person who understands 'Abundance'—has the clue to it. Says she's never seen a book so misrepresented by the critics——"

"Ha, ha! That is good!" Betton agreed with too loud a laugh.

"This one's from a lady, too—married woman. Says she's misunderstood, and would like to correspond."

"Oh, Lord," said Betton.—"What are you looking at?" he added

sharply, as Vyse continued to bend his blinking gaze on the letters.

“I was only thinking I’d never seen such short letters from women. Neither one fills the first page.”

“Well, what of that?” queried Betton.

Vyse reflected. “I’d like to meet a woman like that,” he said wearily; and Betton laughed again.

The letters continued to pour in, and there could be no farther question of dispensing with Vyse’s services. But one morning, about three weeks later, the latter asked for a word with his employer, and Betton, on entering the library, found his secretary with half a dozen documents spread out before him.

“What’s up?” queried Betton, with a touch of impatience.

Vyse was attentively scanning the outspread letters.

“I don’t know: can’t make out.” His voice had a faint note of embarrassment. “Do you remember a note signed *Hester Macklin* that came three or four weeks ago? Married—misunderstood—Western army post—wanted to correspond?”

Betton seemed to grope among his memories; then he assented vaguely.

“A short note,” Vyse went on: “the whole story in half a page. The shortness struck me so much—and the directness—that I wrote her: wrote in my own name, I mean.”

“In your own name?” Betton stood amazed; then he broke into a groan.

“Good Lord, Vyse—you’re incorrigible!”

The secretary pulled his thin moustache with a nervous laugh. “If you mean I’m an ass, you’re right. Look here.” He held out an envelope stamped with the words: “Dead Letter Office.” “My effusion has come back to me marked ‘unknown.’ There’s no such person at the address she gave you.”

Betton seemed for an instant to share his secretary’s embarrassment; then he burst into an uproarious laugh.

“Hoax, was it? That’s rough on you, old fellow!”

Vyse shrugged his shoulders. "Yes; but the interesting question is—why on earth didn't *your* answer come back, too?"

"My answer?"

"The official one—the one I wrote in your name. If she's unknown, what's become of *that*?"

Betton's eyes were wrinkled by amusement. "Perhaps she hadn't disappeared then."

Vyse disregarded the conjecture. "Look here—I believe *all* these letters are a hoax," he broke out.

Betton stared at him with a face that turned slowly red and angry. "What are you talking about? All what letters?"

"These I've got spread out here: I've been comparing them. And I believe they're all written by one man."

Betton's redness turned to a purple that made his ruddy moustache seem pale. "What the devil are you driving at?" he asked.

"Well, just look at it," Vyse persisted, still bent above the letters. "I've been studying them carefully—those that have come within the last two or three weeks—and there's a queer likeness in the writing of some of them. The g's are all like cork-screws. And the same phrases keep recurring—the Ann Arbor news-agent uses the same expressions as the President of the Girl's College at Euphorbia, Maine."

Betton laughed. "Aren't the critics always groaning over the shrinkage of the national vocabulary? Of course we all use the same expressions."

"Yes," said Vyse obstinately. "But how about using the same g's?"

Betton laughed again, but Vyse continued without heeding him: "Look here, Betton—could Strett have written them?"

"Strett?" Betton roared. "*Strett?*" He threw himself into his arm-chair to shake out his mirth at greater ease.

"I'll tell you why. Strett always posts all my answers. He comes in for them every day before I leave. He posted the letter to the misunderstood party—the letter from *you* that the Dead Letter Office

didn't return. *I* posted my own letter to her; and that came back."

A measurable silence followed the emission of this ingenious conjecture; then Betton observed with gentle irony: "Extremely neat. And of course it's no business of yours to supply any valid motive for this remarkable attention on my valet's part."

Vyse cast on him a slanting glance.

"If you've found that human conduct's generally based on valid motives——!"

"Well, outside of mad-houses it's supposed to be not quite incalculable."

Vyse had an odd smile under his thin moustache. "Every house is a mad-house at some time or another."

Betton rose with a careless shake of the shoulders. "This one will be if I talk to you much longer," he said, moving away with a laugh.

IV

Betton did not for a moment believe that Vyse suspected the valet of having written the letters.

"Why the devil don't he say out what he thinks? He was always a tortuous chap," he grumbled inwardly.

The sense of being held under the lens of Vyse's mute scrutiny became more and more exasperating. Betton, by this time, had squared his shoulders to the fact that "Abundance" was a failure with the public: a confessed and glaring failure. The press told him so openly, and his friends emphasised the fact by their circumlocutions and evasions. Betton minded it a good deal more than he had expected, but not nearly as much as he minded Vyse's knowing it. That remained the central twinge in his diffused discomfort. And the problem of getting rid of his secretary once more engaged him.

He had set aside all sentimental pretexts for retaining Vyse; but a practical argument replaced them. "If I ship him now he'll think it's because I'm ashamed to have him see that I'm not getting any more letters."

For the letters had ceased again, almost abruptly, since Vyse had hazarded the conjecture that they were the product of Strett's devoted pen. Betton had reverted only once to the subject—to ask ironically, a day or two later: "Is Strett writing to me as much as ever?"—and, on Vyse's replying with a neutral headshake, had added, laughing: "If you suspect *him* you'll be thinking next that I write the letters myself!"

"There are very few to-day," said Vyse, with an irritating evasiveness; and Betton rejoined squarely: "Oh, they'll stop soon. The book's a failure."

A few mornings later he felt a rush of shame at his own tergiversations, and stalked into the library with Vyse's sentence on his tongue.

Vyse was sitting at the table making pencil-sketches of a girl's profile. Apparently there was nothing else for him to do.

"Is that your idea of Hester Macklin?" asked Betton jovially, leaning over him.

Vyse started back with one of his anæmic blushes. "I was hoping you'd be in. I wanted to speak to you. There've been no letters the last day or two," he explained.

Betton drew a quick breath of relief. The man had some sense of decency, then! He meant to dismiss himself.

"I told you so, my dear fellow; the book's a flat failure," he said, almost gaily.

Vyse made a deprecating gesture. "I don't know that I should regard the absence of letters as the final test. But I wanted to ask you if there isn't something else I can do on the days when there's no writing." He turned his glance toward the book-lined walls. "Don't you want your library catalogued?" he asked insidiously.

"Had it done last year, thanks." Betton glanced away from Vyse's face. It was piteous how he needed the job!

"I see. . . Of course this is just a temporary lull in the letters. They'll begin again—as they did before. The people who read

carefully read slowly—you haven't heard yet what *they* think."

Betton felt a rush of puerile joy at the suggestion. Actually, he hadn't thought of that!

"There was a big second crop after 'Diadems and Faggots,' " he mused aloud.

"Of course. Wait and see," said Vyse confidently.

The letters in fact began again—more gradually and in smaller numbers. But their quality was different, as Vyse had predicted. And in two cases Betton's correspondents, not content to compress into one rapid communication the thoughts inspired by his work, developed their views in a succession of really remarkable letters. One of the writers was a professor in a Western college; the other was a girl in Florida. In their language, their point of view, their reasons for appreciating "Abundance," they differed almost diametrically; but this only made the unanimity of their approval the more striking. The rush of correspondence evoked by Betton's earlier novel had produced nothing so personal, so exceptional as these communications. He had gulped the praise of "Diadems and Faggots" as indiscriminatingly as it was offered; now he knew for the first time the subtler pleasures of the palate. He tried to feign indifference, even to himself; and to Vyse he made no sign. But gradually he felt a desire to know what his secretary thought of the letters, and, above all, what he was saying in reply to them. And he resented acutely the possibility of Vyse's starting one of his clandestine correspondences with the girl in Florida. Vyse's notorious lack of delicacy had never been more vividly present to Betton's imagination; and he made up his mind to answer the letters himself.

He would keep Vyse on, of course: there were other communications that the secretary could attend to. And, if necessary, Betton would invent an occupation: he cursed his stupidity in having betrayed the fact that his books were already catalogued.

Vyse showed no surprise when Betton announced his intention of

dealing personally with the two correspondents who showed so flattering a reluctance to take their leave. But Betton immediately read a criticism in his lack of comment, and put forth, on a note of challenge: "After all, one must be decent!"

Vyse looked at him with an evanescent smile. "You'll have to explain that you didn't write the first answers."

Betton halted. "Well—I—I more or less dictated them, didn't I?"

"Oh, virtually, they're yours, of course."

"You think I can put it that way?"

"Why not?" The secretary absently drew an arabesque on the blotting-pad. "Of course they'll keep it up longer if you write yourself," he suggested.

Betton blushed, but faced the issue. "Hang it all, I shan't be sorry. They interest me. They're remarkable letters." And Vyse, without observation, returned to his writings.

The spring, that year, was delicious to Betton. His college professor continued to address him tersely but cogently at fixed intervals, and twice a week eight serried pages came from Florida. There were other letters, too; he had the solace of feeling that at last "Abundance" was making its way, was reaching the people who, as Vyse said, read slowly because they read intelligently. But welcome as were all these proofs of his restored authority they were but the background of his happiness. His life revolved for the moment about the personality of his two chief correspondents. The professor's letters satisfied his craving for intellectual recognition, and the satisfaction he felt in them proved how completely he had lost faith in himself. He blushed to think that his opinion of his work had been swayed by the shallow judgments of a public whose taste he despised. Was it possible that he had allowed himself to think less well of "Abundance" because it was not to the taste of the average novel-reader? Such false humility was less excusable than the crudest appetite for praise: it was ridiculous to try to do conscientious work if one's self-esteem were at the mercy of popular judgments. All this

the professor's letters delicately and indirectly conveyed to Betton, with the result that the author of "Abundance" began to recognise in it the ripest flower of his genius.

But if the professor understood his book, the girl from Florida understood *him*; and Betton was fully alive to the superior qualities of discernment which this implied. For his lovely correspondent his novel was but the starting point, the pretext of her discourse: he himself was her real object, and he had the delicious sense, as their exchange of thoughts proceeded, that she was interested in "Abundance" because of its author, rather than in the author because of his book. Of course she laid stress on the fact that his ideas were the object of her contemplation; but Betton's agreeable person had permitted him some insight into the incorrigible subjectiveness of female judgments, and he was pleasantly aware, from the lady's tone, that she guessed him to be neither old nor ridiculous. And suddenly he wrote to ask if he might see her. . .

The answer was long in coming. Betton fidgeted at the delay, watched, wondered, fumed; then he received the one word "Impossible."

He wrote back more urgently, and awaited the reply with increasing eagerness. A certain shyness had kept him from once more modifying the instructions regarding his mail, and Strett still carried the letters directly to Vyse. The hour when he knew they were passing under the latter's eyes was now becoming intolerable to Betton, and it was a relief when the secretary, suddenly advised of his father's illness, asked permission to absent himself for a fortnight.

Vyse departed just after Betton had despatched to Florida his second missive of entreaty, and for ten days he tasted the joy of a first perusal of his letters. The answer from Florida was not among them; but Betton said to himself "She's thinking it over," and delay, in that light, seemed favourable. So charming, in fact, was this phase of sentimental suspense that he felt a start of resentment when a

telegram apprised him one morning that Vyse would return to his post that day.

Betton had slept later than usual, and, springing out of bed with the telegram in his hand, he learned from the clock that his secretary was due in half an hour. He reflected that the morning's mail must long since be in; and, too impatient to wait for its appearance with his breakfast-tray, he threw on a dressing-gown and went to the library. There lay the letters, half a dozen of them: but his eyes flew to one envelope, and as he tore it open a warm wave rocked his heart.

The letter was dated a few days after its writer must have received his own: it had all the qualities of grace and insight to which his unknown friend had accustomed him, but it contained no allusion, however indirect, to the special purport of his appeal. Even a vanity less ingenious than Betton's might have read in the lady's silence one of the most familiar motions of consent; but the smile provoked by this inference faded as he turned to his other letters. For the uppermost bore the superscription "Dead Letter Office," and the document that fell from it was his own last letter from Florida.

Betton studied the ironic "Unknown" for an appreciable space of time; then he broke into a laugh. He had suddenly recalled Vyse's similar experience with "Hester Macklin," and the light he was able to throw on that episode was searching enough to penetrate all the dark corners of his own adventure. He felt a rush of heat to the ears; catching sight of himself in the glass, he saw a ridiculous congested countenance, and dropped into a chair to hide it between his fists. He was roused by the opening of the door, and Vyse appeared.

"Oh, I beg pardon—you're ill?" said the secretary.

Betton's only answer was an inarticulate murmur of derision; then he pushed forward the letter with the imprint of the Dead Letter Office.

"Look at that," he jeered.

Vyse peered at the envelope, and turned it over slowly in his

hands. Betton's eyes, fixed on him, saw his face decompose like a substance touched by some powerful acid. He clung to the envelope as if to gain time.

"It's from the young lady you've been writing to at Swazee Springs?" he asked at length.

"It's from the young lady I've been writing to at Swazee Springs."

"Well—I suppose she's gone away," continued Vyse, rebuilding his countenance rapidly.

"Yes; and in a community numbering perhaps a hundred and fifty souls, including the dogs and chickens, the local post-office is so ignorant of her movements that my letter has to be sent to the Dead Letter Office."

Vyse meditated on this; then he laughed in turn. "After all, the same thing happened to me—with 'Hester Macklin,' I mean," he suggested sheepishly.

"Just so," said Betton, bringing down his clenched fist on the table. "*Just so*," he repeated, in italics.

He caught his secretary's glance, and held it with his own for a moment. Then he dropped it as, in pity, one releases something scared and squirming.

"The very day my letter was returned from Swazee Springs she wrote me this from there," he said, holding up the last Florida missive.

"Ha! That's funny," said Vyse, with a damp forehead.

"Yes, it's funny," said Betton. He leaned back, his hands in his pockets, staring up at the ceiling, and noticing a crack in the cornice. Vyse, at the corner of the writing-table, waited.

"Shall I get to work?" he began, after a silence measurable by minutes. Betton's gaze descended from the cornice.

"I've got your seat, haven't I?" he said politely, rising and moving away from the table.

Vyse, with a quick gleam of relief, slipped into the vacant chair, and began to stir about among the papers.

"How's your father?" Betton asked from the hearth. "Oh, better—better, thank you. He'll pull out of it."

"But you had a sharp scare for a day or two?"

"Yes—it was touch and go when I got there."

Another pause, while Vyse began to classify the letters.

"And I suppose," Betton continued in a steady tone, "your anxiety made you forget your usual precautions—whatever they were—about this Florida correspondence, and before you'd had time to prevent it the Swazee post-office blundered?"

Vyse lifted his head with a quick movement. "What do you mean?" he asked, pushing back his chair.

"I mean that you saw I couldn't live without flattery, and that you've been ladling it out to me to earn your keep."

Vyse sat motionless and shrunken, digging the blotting-pad with his pen. "What on earth are you driving at?" he repeated.

"Though why the deuce," Betton continued in the same steady tone, "you should need to do this kind of work when you've got such faculties at your service—those letters were wonderful, my dear fellow! Why in the world don't you write novels, instead of writing to other people about them?"

Vyse straightened himself with an effort. "What are you talking about, Betton? Why the devil do you think *I* wrote those letters?"

Betton held back his answer with a brooding face. "Because I wrote 'Hester Macklin's'—to myself!"

Vyse sat stock-still, without the least outcry of wonder. "Well——?" he finally said, in a low tone.

"And because you found me out (you see, you can't even feign surprise!)—because you saw through it at a glance, knew at once that the letters were faked. And when you'd foolishly put me on my guard by pointing out to me that they were a clumsy forgery, and had then suddenly guessed that *I* was the forger, you drew the natural inference that I had to have popular approval, or at least had to make *you* think I had it. You saw that, to me, the worst thing

about the failure of the book was having *you* know it was a failure. And so you applied your superior—your immeasurably superior—abilities to carrying on the humbug, and deceiving me as I'd tried to deceive you. And you did it so successfully that I don't see why the devil you haven't made your fortune writing novels!"

Vyse remained silent, his head slightly bent under the mounting tide of Betton's denunciation.

"The way you differentiated your people—characterised them—avoided my stupid mistake of making the women's letters too short and too logical, of letting my different correspondents use the same expressions: the amount of ingenuity and art you wasted on it! I swear, Vyse, I'm sorry that damned post-office went back on you," Betton went on, piling up the waves of his irony.

But at this height they suddenly paused, drew back on themselves, and began to recede before the sight of Vyse's misery. Something warm and emotional in Betton's nature—a lurking kindliness, perhaps, for any one who tried to soothe and smooth his writhing ego—softened his eye as it rested on the figure of his secretary.

"Look here, Vyse—I'm not sorry—not altogether sorry this has happened!" He moved across the room, and laid his hand on Vyse's drooping shoulder. "In a queer illogical way it evens up things, as it were. I did you a shabby turn once, years ago—oh, out of sheer carelessness, of course—about that novel of yours I promised to give to Aphthorn. If I *had* given it, it might not have made any difference—I'm not sure it wasn't too good for success—but anyhow, I dare say you thought my personal influence might have helped you, might at least have got you a quicker hearing. Perhaps you thought it was because the thing *was* so good that I kept it back, that I felt some nasty jealousy of your superiority. I swear to you it wasn't that—I clean forgot it. And one day when I came home it was gone: you'd sent and taken it away. And I've always thought since that you might have owed me a grudge—and not unjustly; so this . . . this business of the letters . . . the sympathy you've shown . . . for I suppose it is

sympathy . . ?”

Vyse startled and checked him by a queer crackling laugh.

“It’s *not* sympathy?” broke in Betton, the moisture drying out of his voice. He withdrew his hand from Vyse’s shoulder. “What is it, then? The joy of uncovering my nakedness? An eye for an eye? Is it *that*?”

Vyse rose from his seat, and with a mechanical gesture swept into a heap all the letters he had sorted.

“I’m stone broke, and wanted to keep my job—that’s what it is,” he said wearily . . .

The Legend

ARTHUR BERNALD could never afterward recall just when the first conjecture flashed on him: oddly enough, there was no record of it in the agitated jottings of his diary. But, as it seemed to him in retrospect, he had always felt that the queer man at the Wades' must be John Pellerin, if only for the negative reason that he couldn't imaginably be any one else. It was impossible, in the confused pattern of the century's intellectual life, to fit the stranger in anywhere, save in the big gap which, some five and twenty years earlier, had been left by Pellerin's disappearance; and conversely, such a man as the Wades' visitor couldn't have lived for sixty years without filling, somewhere in space, a nearly equivalent void.

At all events, it was certainly not to Doctor Wade or to his mother that Bernald owed the hint: the good unconscious Wades, one of whose chief charms in the young man's eyes was that they remained so robustly untainted by Pellerinism, in spite of the fact that Doctor Wade's younger brother, Howland, was among its most impudently flourishing high-priests.

The incident had begun by Bernald's running across Doctor Robert Wade one hot summer night at the University Club, and by Wade's saying, in the tone of unprofessional laxity which the shadowy stillness of the place invited: "I got hold of a queer fish at St. Martin's the other day—case of heat-prostration picked up in Central Park. When we'd patched him up I found he had nowhere to go, and not a dollar in his pocket, and I sent him down to our place at Portchester to rebuild."

The opening roused his hearer's attention. Bob Wade had an instinctive sense of values that Bernald had learned to trust.

"What sort of chap? Young or old?"

"Oh, every age—full of years, and yet with a lot left. He called himself sixty on the books."

"Sixty's a good age for some kinds of living. And age is purely subjective. How has he used his sixty years?"

"Well—part of them in educating himself, apparently. He's a scholar—humanities, languages, and so forth."

"Oh—decayed gentleman," Bernald murmured, disappointed.

"Decayed? Not much!" cried the doctor with his accustomed literalness. "I only mentioned that side of Winterman—his name's Winterman—because it was the side my mother noticed first. I suppose women generally do. But it's only a part—a small part. The man's the big thing."

"Really big?"

"Well—there again. . . . When I took him down to the country, looking rather like a tramp from a 'Shelter,' with an untrimmed beard, and a suit of reach-me-downs he'd slept round the Park in for a week, I felt sure my mother'd carry the silver up to her room, and send for the gardener's dog to sleep in the hall. But she didn't."

"I see. 'Women and children love him.' Oh, Wade!" Bernald groaned.

"Not a bit of it! You're out again. We don't love him, either of us. But we *feel* him—the air's charged with him. You'll see."

And Bernald agreed that he *would* see, the following Sunday. Wade's inarticulate attempts to characterise the stranger had struck his friend. The human revelation had for Bernald a poignant and ever-renewed interest, which his trade, as the dramatic critic of a daily paper, had hitherto failed to diminish. And he knew that Bob Wade, simple and undefiled by literature—Bernald's specific affliction—had a free and personal way of judging men, and the diviner's knack of reaching their hidden springs. During the days that

followed, the young doctor gave Bernald further details about John Winterman: details not of fact—for in that respect the stranger's reticence was baffling—but of impression. It appeared that Winterman, while lying insensible in the Park, had been robbed of the few dollars he possessed; and on leaving the hospital, still weak and half-blind, he had quite simply and unprotestingly accepted the Wades' offer to give him shelter till such time as he should be strong enough to work.

"But what's his work?" Bernald interjected. "Hasn't he at least told you that?"

"Well, writing. Some kind of writing." Doctor Bob always became vague when he approached the confines of literature. "He means to take it up again as soon as his eyes get right."

Bernald groaned again. "Oh, Lord—that finishes him; and *me!* He's looking for a publisher, of course—he wants a 'favourable notice.' I won't come!"

"He hasn't written a line for twenty years."

"A line of *what?* What kind of literature can one keep corked up for twenty years?"

Wade surprised him. "The real kind, I should say. But I don't know Winterman's line," the doctor added. "He speaks of the things he used to write merely as 'stuff that wouldn't sell.' He has a wonderfully confidential way of *not* telling one things. But he says he'll have to do something for his living as soon as his eyes are patched up, and that writing is the only trade he knows. The queer thing is that he seems pretty sure of selling *now*. He even talked of buying the bungalow of us, with an acre or two about it."

"The bungalow? What's that?"

"The studio down by the shore that we built for Howland when he thought he meant to paint." (Howland Wade, as Bernald knew, had experienced various "calls.") "Since he's taken to writing nobody's been near the place. I offered it to Winterman, and he camps there—cooks his meals, does his own housekeeping, and never comes up to

the house except in the evenings, when he joins us on the verandah, in the dark, and smokes while my mother knits."

"A discreet visitor, eh?"

"More than he need be. My mother actually wanted him to stay on in the house—in her pink chintz room. Think of it! But he says houses smother him. I take it he's lived for years in the open."

"In the open where?"

"I can't make out, except that it was somewhere in the East. 'East of everything—beyond the day-spring. In places not on the map.' That's the way he put it; and when I said: 'You've been an explorer, then?' he smiled in his beard, and answered: 'Yes; that's it—an explorer.' Yet he doesn't strike me as a man of action: hasn't the hands or the eyes."

"What sort of hands and eyes has he?"

Wade reflected. His range of observation was not large, but within its limits it was exact and could give an account of itself.

"He's worked a lot with his hands, but that's not what they were made for. I should say they were extraordinarily delicate conductors of sensation. And his eye—his eye too. He hasn't used it to dominate people: he didn't care to. He simply looks through 'em all like windows. Makes me feel like the fellows who think they're made of glass. The mitigating circumstance is that he seems to see such a glorious landscape through me." Wade grinned at the thought of serving such a purpose.

"I see. I'll come on Sunday and be looked through!" Bernald cried.

II

Bernald came on two successive Sundays; and the second time he lingered till the Tuesday.

"Here he comes!" Wade had said, the first evening, as the two young men, with Wade's mother, sat on the verandah, with the Virginian creeper drawing, between the arches, its black arabesques against a moon-lined sky.

Bernald heard a step on the gravel, and saw the red flit of a cigar through the shrubs. Then a loosely-moving figure obscured the patch of sky between the creepers, and the spark became the centre of a dim bearded face, in which Bernald, through the darkness, discerned only a broad white gleam of forehead.

It was the young man's subsequent impression that Winterman had not spoken much that first evening; at any rate, Bernald himself remembered chiefly what the Wades had said. And this was the more curious because he had come for the purpose of studying their visitor, and because there was nothing to distract his attention in Wade's slow phrases or his mother's artless comments. He reflected afterward that there must have been a mysteriously fertilising quality in the stranger's silence: it had brooded over their talk like a rain-cloud over a dry country.

Mrs. Wade, apparently fearing that her son might have given Bernald an exaggerated notion of their visitor's importance, had hastened to qualify it before the latter appeared.

"He's not what you or Howland would call intellectual—" (Bernald winced at the coupling of the names)—"not in the least *literary*; though he told Bob he used to write. I don't think, though, it could have been what Howland would call writing." Mrs. Wade always named her younger son with a reverential drop of the voice. She viewed literature much as she did Providence, as an inscrutable mystery; and she spoke of Howland as a dedicated being, set apart to perform secret rites within the veil of the sanctuary.

"I shouldn't say he had a quick mind," she continued, reverting to Winterman. "Sometimes he hardly seems to follow what we're saying. But he's got such sound ideas—when he does speak he's never silly. And clever people sometimes *are*, don't you think so?" Bernald sighed an unqualified assent. "And he's so capable. The other day something went wrong with the kitchen range, just as I was expecting some friends of Bob's for dinner; and do you know, when Mr. Winterman heard we were in trouble, he came and took a look,

and knew at once what to do? I told him it was a dreadful pity he wasn't married!"

Close on midnight, when the session on the verandah ended, and the two young men were strolling down to the bungalow at Winterman's side, Bernald's mind reverted to the image of the fertilising cloud. There was something brooding, pregnant, in the silent presence beside him: he had, in place of any circumscribing personal impression, a large hovering sense of manifold latent meanings. And he felt a thrill of relief when, half-way down the lawn, Doctor Bob was checked by a voice that called him back to the telephone.

"Now I'll be with him alone!" thought Bernald, with a throb like a lover's.

Under the low rafters of the bungalow Winterman had to grope for the lamp on his desk, and as its light struck up into his face Bernald's sense of the rareness of the opportunity increased. He couldn't have said why, for the face, with its bossed forehead, its shabby greyish beard and blunt Socratic nose, made no direct appeal to the eye. It seemed rather like a stage on which remarkable things might be enacted, like some shaggy moorland landscape dependent for form and expression on the clouds rolling over it, and the bursts of light between; and one of these flashed out in the smile with which Winterman, as if in answer to his companion's thought, said simply, as he turned to fill his pipe: "Now we'll talk."

So he'd known all along that they hadn't yet—and had guessed that, with Bernald, one might!

The young man's sudden glow of pleasure left him for a moment unable to meet the challenge; and in that moment he felt the sweep of something winged and summoning. His spirit rose to it with a rush, but just as he felt himself poised between the ascending pinions, the door opened and Bob Wade reappeared.

"Too bad! I'm so sorry! It was from Howland, to say he can't come

to-morrow after all.” The doctor panted out his news with honest grief.

“I tried my best to pull it off for you, Winterman; and my brother *wants* to come—he’s keen to talk to you and see what he can do. But you see he’s so tremendously in demand. He’ll try for another Sunday later on.”

Winterman gave an untroubled nod. “Oh, he’ll find me here. I shall work my time out slowly.” He waved his hand toward the scattered sheets on the kitchen table which formed his desk.

“Not slowly enough to suit us,” Wade answered hospitably. “Only, if Howland could have come he might have given you a tip or two—put you on the right track—shown you how to get in touch with the public.”

Winterman, his hands in his pockets, lounged against the bare pine walls, twisting his pipe under his beard. “Does your brother enjoy the privilege of that contact?” he questioned gravely.

Wade stared a little. “Oh, of course Howland’s not what you’d call a *popular* writer; he despises that kind of thing. But whatever he says goes with—well, with the chaps who count; and every one tells me he’s written *the* book on Pellerin. You must read it when you get back your eyes.” He paused, as if to let the name sink in, but Winterman drew at his pipe with a blank face. “You must have heard of Pellerin, I suppose?” the doctor continued. “I’ve never read a word of him myself: he’s too big a proposition for *me*. But one can’t escape the talk about him. I have him crammed down my throat even in hospital. The internes read him at the clinics. He tumbles out of the nurses’ pockets. The patients keep him under their pillows. Oh, with most of them, of course, it’s just a craze, like the last new game or puzzle: they don’t understand him in the least. Howland says that even now, twenty-five years after his death, and with his books in everybody’s hands, there are not twenty people who really understand Pellerin; and Howland ought to know, if anybody does. He’s—what’s their great word?—*interpreted* him. You must get

Howland to put you through a course of Pellerin.”

And as the young men, having taken leave of Winterman, retraced their way across the lawn, Wade continued to develop the theme of his brother’s accomplishments.

“I wish I *could* get Howland to take an interest in Winterman: this is the third Sunday he’s chucked us. Of course he does get bored with people consulting him about their writings—but I believe if he could only talk to Winterman he’d see something in him, as we do. And it would be such a god-send to the poor devil to have some one to advise him about his work. I’m going to make a desperate effort to get Howland here next Sunday.”

It was then that Bernald vowed to himself that he would return the next Sunday at all costs. He hardly knew whether he was prompted by the impulse to shield Winterman from Howland Wade’s ineptitude, or by the desire to see the latter abandon himself to the full shamelessness of its display; but of one fact he was assured—and that was of the existence in Winterman of some quality which would provoke Howland to the amplest exercise of his fatuity. “How he’ll draw him—how he’ll draw him!” Bernald chuckled, with a security the more unaccountable that his one glimpse of Winterman had shown the latter only as a passive subject for observation; and he felt himself avenged in advance for the injury of Howland Wade’s existence.

III

That this hope was to be frustrated Bernald learned from Howland Wade’s own lips, the day before the two young men were to have met at Portchester.

“I can’t really, my dear fellow,” the Interpreter lisped, passing a polished hand over the faded smoothness of his face. “Oh, an authentic engagement, I assure you: otherwise, to oblige old Bob I’d submit cheerfully to looking over his foundling’s literature. But I’m

pledged this week to the Pellerin Society of Kenosha: I had a hand in founding it, and for two years now they've been patiently waiting for a word from me—the *Fiat Lux*, so to speak. You see it's a ministry, Bernald—I assure you, I look upon my calling quite religiously."

As Bernald listened, his disappointment gradually changed to relief. Howland, on trial, always turned out to be too insufferable, and the pleasure of watching his antics was invariably lost in the impulse to put a sanguinary end to them.

"If he'd only kept his beastly pink hands off Pellerin," Bernald sighed, thinking for the hundredth time of the thick manuscript condemned to perpetual incarceration in his own desk by the publication of Howland's "definitive" work on the great man. One couldn't, *after* Howland Wade, expose one's self to the derision of writing about Pellerin: the eagerness with which Wade's book had been devoured proved, not that the public had enough appetite for another, but simply that, for a stomach so indiscriminating, anything better than Wade had given it would be too good. And Bernald, in the confidence that his own work was open to this objection, had stoically locked it up. Yet if he had resigned himself to the fact that Wade's book existed, and was already passing into the immortality of perpetual republication, he could not, after repeated trials, adjust himself to the author's talk about Pellerin. When Wade wrote of the great dead he was egregious, but in conversation he was familiar and fond. It might have been supposed that one of the beauties of Pellerin's hidden life and mysterious taking off would have been to guard him from the fingering of anecdote; but biographers like Howland Wade are born to rise above such obstacles. He might be vague or inaccurate in dealing with the few recorded events of his subject's life; but when he left fact for conjecture no one had a firmer footing. Whole chapters in his volume were constructed in the conditional mood and made up of hypothetical detail; and in talk, by the very law of the process, hypothesis became affirmation, and he was ready to tell you confidentially the exact circumstances of

Pellerin's death, and of the "distressing incident" leading up to it. Bernald himself not only questioned the form under which this incident was shaping itself before posterity, but the very fact of its occurrence: he had never been able to discover any break in the dense cloud enveloping Pellerin's end. He had gone away—that was all that any of them knew: he who had so little, at any time, been with them or of them; and his going had so slightly stirred the public consciousness that the news of his death, laconically imparted from afar, had dropped unheeded into the universal scrap-basket, to be long afterward fished out, with all its details missing, when some enquiring spirit first became aware, by chance encounter with a volume in a London book-stall, not only that such a man as John Pellerin had died, but that he had ever lived, or written.

It need hardly be noted that Howland Wade had not been the pioneer in question: his had been the safer part of swelling the chorus when it rose, and gradually drowning the other voices by his own. He had pitched his note so screamingly, and held it so long, that he was now the accepted authority on Pellerin, not only in the land which had given birth to his genius but in the Europe which had first acclaimed it; and it was the central point of pain in Bernald's sense of the situation that a man who had so yearned for silence should have his grave piped over by such a voice as Wade's.

Bernald's talk with the Interpreter had revived this ache to the momentary exclusion of other sensations; and he was still sore with it when, the next afternoon, he arrived at Portchester for his second Sunday with the Wades.

At the station he had the surprise of seeing Winterman's face on the platform, and of hearing from him that Doctor Bob had been called away to assist at an operation in a distant town.

"Mrs. Wade wanted to put you off, but I believe the message came too late; so she sent me down to break the news to you," said Winterman, holding out his hand.

Perhaps because they were the first conventional words that

Bernald had heard him speak, the young man was struck by the quality his intonation gave them.

“She wanted to send a carriage,” Winterman added, “but I told her we’d walk back through the woods.” He looked at Bernald with a kindness that flushed the young man with pleasure.

“Are you strong enough? It’s not too far?”

“Oh, no. I’m pulling myself together. Getting back to work is the slowest part of the business: not on account of my eyes—I can use them now, though not for reading; but some of the links between things are missing. It’s a kind of broken spectrum . . . here, that boy will look after your bag.”

The walk through the woods remained in Bernald’s memory as an enchanted hour. He used the word literally, as descriptive of the way in which Winterman’s contact changed the face of things, or perhaps restored them to their deeper meanings. And the scene they traversed—one of those little untended woods that still, in America, fringe the tawdry skirts of civilisation—acquired, as a background to Winterman, the hush of a spot aware of transcendent visitings. Did he talk, or did he make Bernald talk? The young man never knew. He recalled only a sense of lightness and liberation, as if the hard walls of individuality had melted, and he were merged in the poet’s deeper interfusion, yet without losing the least sharp edge of self. This general impression resolved itself afterward into the sense of Winterman’s wide elemental range. His thought encircled things like the horizon at sea. He didn’t, as it happened, touch on lofty themes—Bernald was gleefully aware that, to Howland Wade, their talk would hardly have been Talk at all—but Winterman’s mind, applied to lowly topics, was like a lens that brought out microscopic delicacies and differences.

The lack of Sunday trains kept Doctor Bob for two days on the scene of his surgical duties, and during those two days Bernald seized every moment of communion with his friend’s guest. Winterman, as Wade had said, was reticent concerning his personal affairs, or rather

concerning the practical and material questions to which the term is generally applied. But it was evident that, in Winterman's case, the usual classification must be reversed, and that the discussion of ideas carried one much farther into his intimacy than familiarity with the incidents of his life.

"That's exactly what Howland Wade and his tribe have never understood about Pellerin: that it's much less important to know how, or even why, he disapp——"

Bernald pulled himself up with a jerk, and turned to look full at his companion. It was late on the Monday evening, and the two men, after an hour's chat on the verandah to the tune of Mrs. Wade's knitting-needles, had bidden their hostess good-night and strolled back to the bungalow together.

"Come and have a pipe before you turn in," Winterman had said; and they had sat on together till midnight, with the door of the bungalow open on the heaving moonlit bay, and summer insects bumping against the chimney of the lamp. Winterman had just bent down to refill his pipe from the jar on the table, and Bernald, jerking about to catch him in the circle of lamplight, sat speechless, staring at a fact that seemed suddenly to have substituted itself for Winterman's face, or rather to have taken on its features.

"No, they never saw that Pellerin's ideas *were* Pellerin. . . ." He continued to stare at Winterman. "Just as this man's ideas are—why, *are* Pellerin!"

The thought uttered itself in a kind of inner shout, and Bernald started upright with the violent impact of his conclusion. Again and again in the last forty-eight hours he had exclaimed to himself: "This is as good as Pellerin." Why hadn't he said till now: "This *is* Pellerin"? . . . Surprising as the answer was, he had no choice but to take it. He hadn't said so simply because Winterman was *better than Pellerin*—that there was so much more of him, so to speak. Yes; but—it came to Bernald in a flash—wouldn't there by this time have been any amount more of Pellerin? . . . The young man felt actually dizzy

with the thought. That was it—there was the solution of the problem! This man was Pellerin, and more than Pellerin! It was so fantastic and yet so unanswerable that he burst into a sudden laugh.

Winterman, at the same moment, brought his palm down with a crash on the pile of manuscript covering the desk.

“What’s the matter?” Bernald cried.

“My match wasn’t out. In another minute the destruction of the library of Alexandria would have been a trifle compared to what you’d have seen.” Winterman, with his large deep laugh, shook out the smouldering sheets. “And I should have been a pensioner on Doctor Bob the Lord knows how much longer!”

Bernald looked at him intently. “You’ve really got going again? The thing’s actually getting into shape?”

“This particular thing is in shape. I drove at it hard all last week, thinking our friend’s brother would be down on Sunday, and might look it over.”

Bernald had to repress the tendency to another wild laugh. “Howland—you meant to show *Howland* what you’ve done?”

Winterman, looming against the moonlight, slowly turned a dusky shaggy head toward him.

“Isn’t it a good thing to do?”

Bernald wavered, torn between loyalty to his friends and the grotesqueness of answering in the affirmative. After all, it was none of his business to furnish Winterman with an estimate of Howland Wade.

“Well, you see, you’ve never told me what your line is,” he answered, temporising.

“No, because nobody’s ever told *me*. It’s exactly what I want to find out,” said the other genially.

“And you expect Wade——?”

“Why, I gathered from our good Doctor that it’s his trade. Doesn’t he explain—interpret?”

“In his own domain—which is Pellerinism.”

Winterman gazed out musingly upon the moon-touched dusk of waters. "And what is Pellerinism?" he asked.

Bernald sprang to his feet with a cry. "Ah, I don't know—but you're Pellerin!"

They stood for a minute facing each other, among the uncertain swaying shadows of the room, with the sea breathing through it as something immense and inarticulate breathed through young Bernald's thoughts; then Winterman threw up his arms with a humorous gesture.

"Don't shoot!" he said.

IV

Dawn found them there, and the sun laid its beams on the rough floor of the bungalow, before either of the men was conscious of the passage of time. Bernald, vaguely trying to define his own state in retrospect, could only phrase it: "I floated . . . floated . . ."

The gist of fact at the core of the extraordinary experience was simply that John Pellerin, twenty-five years earlier, had voluntarily disappeared, causing the rumour of his death to be reported to an inattentive world; and that now he had come back to see what that world had made of him.

"You'll hardly believe it of me; I hardly believe it of myself; but I went away in a rage of disappointment, of wounded pride—no, vanity! I don't know which cut deepest—the sneers or the silence—but between them, there wasn't an inch of me that wasn't raw. I had just the one thing in me: the message, the cry, the revelation. But nobody saw and nobody listened. Nobody wanted what I had to give. I was like a poor devil of a tramp looking for shelter on a bitter night, in a town with every door bolted and all the windows dark. And suddenly I felt that the easiest thing would be to lie down and go to sleep in the snow. Perhaps I'd a vague notion that if they found me there at daylight, frozen stiff, the pathetic spectacle might produce a reaction, a feeling of remorse. . . So I took care to be

found! Well, a good many thousand people die every day on the face of the globe; and I soon discovered that I was simply one of the thousands; and when I made that discovery I really died—and stayed dead a year or two. . . . When I came to life again I was off on the under side of the world, in regions unaware of what we know as ‘the public.’ Have you any notion how it shifts the point of view to wake under new constellations? I advise any who’s been in love with a woman under Cassiopeia to go and think about her under the Southern Cross. . . . It’s the only way to tell the pivotal truths from the others. . . . I didn’t believe in my theory any less—there was my triumph and my vindication! It held out, resisted, measured itself with the stars. But I didn’t care a snap of my finger whether anybody else believed in it, or even knew it had been formulated. It escaped out of my books—my poor still-born books—like Psyche from the chrysalis, and soared away into the blue, and lived there. I knew then how it frees an idea to be ignored; how apprehension circumscribes and deforms it. . . . Once I’d learned that, it was easy enough to turn to and shift for myself. I was sure now that my idea would live: the good ones are self-supporting. And meanwhile *I* had to learn to be so; and I tried my hand at a number of things . . . adventurous, menial, commercial. . . . It’s not a bad thing for a man to have to live his life—and we nearly all manage to dodge it. Our first round with the Sphinx may strike something out of us—a book or a picture or a symphony; and we’re amazed at our feat, and go on letting that first work breed others, as some animal forms reproduce each other without renewed fertilisation. So there we are, committed to our first guess at the riddle; and our works look as like as successive impressions of the same plate, each with the lines a little fainter; whereas they ought to be—if we touch earth between times—as different from each other as those other creatures—jelly-fish, aren’t they, of a kind?—where successive generations produce new forms, and it takes a zoologist to see the hidden likeness. . . .

“Well, I proved my first guess, off there in the wilds, and it lived,

and grew, and took care of itself. And I said, 'Some day it will make itself heard; but by that time my atoms will have waltzed into a new pattern.' Then, in Cashmere one day, I met a fellow in a caravan, with a dog-eared book in his pocket. He said he never stirred without it—wanted to know where I'd been, never to have heard of it. It was *my guess*—in its twentieth edition! . . . The globe spun round at that, and all of a sudden I was under the old stars. That's the way it happens when the ballast of vanity shifts! I'd lived a third of a life out there, unconscious of human opinion—because I supposed it was unconscious of *me*. But now—now! Oh, it was different. I wanted to know what they said. . . . Not exactly that, either: I wanted to know *what I'd made them say*. There's a difference. . . . And here I am," said John Pellerin, with a pull at his pipe.

So much Bernald retained of his companion's actual narrative; the rest was swept away under the tide of wonder that rose and submerged him as Pellerin—at some indefinitely later stage of their talk—picked up his manuscript and began to read. Bernald sat opposite, his elbows propped on the table, his eyes fixed on the swaying waters outside, from which the moon gradually faded, leaving them to make a denser blackness in the night. As Pellerin read, this density of blackness—which never for a moment seemed inert or unalive—was attenuated by imperceptible degrees, till a greyish pallor replaced it; then the pallor breathed and brightened, and suddenly dawn was on the sea.

Something of the same nature went on in the young man's mind while he watched and listened. He was conscious of a gradually withdrawing light, of an interval of obscurity full of the stir of invisible forces, and then of the victorious flush of day. And as the light rose, he saw how far he had travelled and what wonders the night had prepared. Pellerin had been right in saying that his first idea had survived, had borne the test of time; but he had given his hearer no hint of the extent to which it had been enlarged and modified, of the fresh implications it now unfolded. In a brief flash of

retrospection Bernald saw the earlier books dwindle and fall into their place as mere precursors of this fuller revelation; then, with a leap of rage, he pictured Howland Wade's pink hands on the new treasure, and his prophetic feet upon the lecture platform.

V

"It won't do—oh, he let him down as gently as possible; but it appears it simply won't do."

Doctor Bob imparted the ineluctable fact to Bernald while the two men, accidentally meeting at their club a few nights later, sat together over the dinner they had immediately agreed to share.

Bernald had left Portchester the morning after his strange discovery, and he and Bob Wade had not seen each other since. And now Bernald, moved by an irresistible instinct of postponement, had waited for his companion to bring up Winterman's name, and had even executed several conversational diversions in the hope of delaying its mention. For how could one talk of Winterman with the thought of Pellerin swelling one's breast?

"Yes; the very day Howland got back from Kenosha I brought the manuscript to town, and got him to read it. And yesterday evening I nailed him, and dragged an answer out of him."

"Then Howland hasn't seen Winterman yet?"

"No. He said: 'Before you let him loose on me I'll go over the stuff, and see if it's all worth while.' "

Bernald drew a freer breath. "And he found it wasn't?"

"Between ourselves, he found it was of no account at all. Queer, isn't it, when the *man* . . . but of course literature's another proposition. Howland says it's one of the cases where an idea might seem original and striking if one didn't happen to be able to trace its descent. And this is straight out of bosh—by Pellerin. . . Yes: Pellerin. It seems that everything in the article that isn't pure nonsense is just Pellerinism. Howland thinks Winterman must have been tremendously struck by Pellerin's writings, and have lived too much

out of the world to know that they've become the textbooks of modern thought. Otherwise, of course, he'd have taken more trouble to disguise his plagiarisms."

"I see," Bernald mused. "Yet you say there is an original element?"

"Yes; but unluckily it's no good."

"It's not—conceivably—in any sense a development of Pellerin's idea: a logical step farther?"

"*Logical?* Howland says it's twaddle at white heat."

Bernald sat silent, divided between the satisfaction of seeing the Interpreter rush upon his fate, and the despair of knowing that the state of mind he represented was indestructible. Then both emotions were swept away on a wave of pure joy, as he reflected that now, at last, Howland Wade had given him back John Pellerin.

The possession was one he did not mean to part with lightly; and the dread of its being torn from him constrained him to extraordinary precautions.

"You've told Winterman, I suppose? How did he take it?"

"Why, unexpectedly, as he does most things. You can never tell which way he'll jump. I thought he'd take a high tone, or else laugh it off; but he did neither. He seemed awfully cast down. I wished myself well out of the job when I saw how cut up he was."

Bernald thrilled at the words. Pellerin had shared his own pang, then—the "old woe of the world" at the perpetuity of human dulness!

"But what did he say to the charge of plagiarism—if you made it?"

"Oh, I told him straight out what Howland said. I thought it fairer. And his answer to that was the rummest part of all."

"What was it?" Bernald questioned, with a tremor.

"He said: 'That's queer, for I've never read Pellerin.' "

Bernald drew a deep breath. "Well—and I suppose you believed him?"

"I believed him, because I know him. But the public won't—the critics won't. And if the plagiarism is a pure coincidence it's just as

bad for him as if it were a straight steal—isn't it?"

Bernald sighed his acquiescence.

"It bothers me awfully," Wade continued, knitting his kindly brows, "because I could see what a blow it was to him. He's got to earn his living, and I don't suppose he knows how to do anything but write. At his age it's hard to start fresh. I put that to Howland—asked him if there wasn't a chance he might do better if he only had a little encouragement. I can't help feeling he's got the essential thing in him. But of course I'm no judge when it comes to books. And Howland says it would be cruel to give him any hope." Wade paused, turned his wineglass about under a meditative stare, and then leaned across the table toward Bernald. "Look here—do you know what I've proposed to Winterman? That he should come to town with me to-morrow and go in the evening to hear Howland lecture to the Uplift Club. They're to meet at Mrs. Beecher Bain's, and Howland is to repeat the lecture that he gave the other day before the Pellerin Society at Kenosha. It will give Winterman a chance to get some notion of what Pellerin was: he'll get it much straighter from Howland than if he tried to plough through Pellerin's books. And then afterward—as if accidentally—I thought I might bring him and Howland together. If Howland could only see him and hear him talk, there's no knowing what might come of it. He couldn't help feeling the man's force, as we do; and he might give him a pointer—tell him what line to take. Anyhow, it would please Winterman, and take the edge off his disappointment. I saw that as soon as I proposed it."

"Some one who's never heard of Pellerin?"

Mrs. Beecher Bain, large, smiling, diffuse, reached out through the incoming throng on her threshold to detain Bernald with the question as he was about to move past her in the wake of his companion.

"Oh, keep straight on, Mr. Winterman!" she interrupted herself to call after the latter. "Into the back drawing-room, please! And

remember, you're to sit next to me—in the corner on the left, close under the platform.”

She renewed her interrogative clutch on Bernald's sleeve. “Most curious! Doctor Wade has been telling me all about your friend—how remarkable you all think him. And it's actually true that he's never heard of Pellerin? Of course as soon as Doctor Wade told me *that*, I said ‘Bring him!’ It will be so extraordinarily interesting to watch the first impression. —Yes, do follow him, dear Mr. Bernald, and be sure that you and he secure the seats next to me. Of course Alice Fosdick insists on being with us. She was wild with excitement when I told her she was to meet some one who'd never heard of Pellerin!”

On the indulgent lips of Mrs. Beecher Bain conjecture speedily passed into affirmation; and as Bernald's companion, broad and shaggy in his visible new evening clothes, moved down the length of the crowded rooms, he was already, to the ladies drawing aside their skirts to let him pass, the interesting Huron of the fable.

How far he was aware of the character ascribed to him it was impossible for Bernald to discover. He was as unconscious as a tree or a cloud, and his observer had never known any one so alive to human contacts and yet so secure from them. But the scene was playing such a lively tune on Bernald's own sensibilities that for the moment he could not adjust himself to the probable effect it produced on his companion. The young man, of late, had made but rare appearances in the group of which Mrs. Beecher Bain was one of the most indefatigable hostesses, and the Uplift Club the chief medium of expression. To a critic, obliged by his trade to cultivate convictions, it was the essence of luxury to leave them at home in his hours of ease; and Bernald gave his preference to circles in which less finality of judgment prevailed, and it was consequently less embarrassing to be caught without an opinion.

But in his fresher days he had known the spell of the Uplift Club and the thrill of moving among the Emancipated; and he felt an odd

sense of rejuvenation as he looked at the rows of faces packed about the embowered platform from which Howland Wade was presently to hand down the eternal verities. Many of these countenances belonged to the old days, when the gospel of Pellerin was unknown, and had required considerable intellectual courage to avow one's acceptance of the very doctrines he had since demolished. The latter moral revolution seemed to have been accepted as submissively as a change in hair-dressing; and it even struck Bernald that, in the case of many of the assembled ladies, their convictions were rather newer than their clothes.

One of the most interesting examples of this readiness of adaptation was actually, in the person of Miss Alice Fosdick, brushing his elbow with exotic amulets, and enveloping him in Arabian odours, as she leaned forward to murmur her sympathetic sense of the situation. Miss Fosdick, who was one of the most advanced exponents of Pellerinism, had large eyes and a plaintive mouth, and Bernald had always fancied that she might have been pretty if she had not been perpetually explaining things.

"Yes, I know—Isabella Bain told me all about him. (He can't hear us, can he?) And I wonder if you realise how remarkably interesting it is that we should have such an opportunity *now*—I mean the opportunity to see the impression of Pellerinism on a perfectly fresh mind. (You must introduce him as soon as the lecture's over.) I explained that to Isabella as soon as she showed me Doctor Wade's note. Of course you see why, don't you?" Bernald made a faint motion of acquiescence, which she instantly swept aside. "At least I think I can *make you see why*. (If you're sure he can't hear?) Why, it's just this—Pellerinism is in danger of becoming a truism. Oh, it's an awful thing to say! But then I'm not afraid of saying awful things! I rather believe it's my mission. What I mean is, that we're getting into the way of taking Pellerin for granted—as we do the air we breathe. We don't sufficiently lead our *conscious life* in him—we're gradually letting him become subliminal." She swayed closer to the young

man, and he saw that she was making a graceful attempt to throw her explanatory net over his companion, who, evading Mrs. Bain's hospitable signal, had cautiously wedged himself into a seat between Bernald and the wall.

"*Did* you hear what I was saying, Mr. Winterman? (Yes, I know who you are, of course!) Oh, well, I don't really mind if you did. I was talking about you—about you and Pellerin. I was explaining to Mr. Bernald that what we need at this very minute is a Pellerin revival; and we need some one like you—to whom his message comes as a wonderful new interpretation of life—to lead the revival, and rouse us out of our apathy. . .

"You see," she went on winningly, "it's not only the big public that needs it (of course *their* Pellerin isn't ours!) It's we, his disciples, his interpreters, we who discovered him and gave him to the world—we, the Chosen People, the Custodians of the Sacred Books, as Howland Wade calls us—it's *we* who are in perpetual danger of sinking back into the old stagnant ideals, and practising the Seven Deadly Virtues; it's *we* who need to count our mercies, and realise anew what he's done for us, and what we ought to do for him! And it's for that reason that I urged Mr. Wade to speak here, in the very inner sanctuary of Pellerinism, exactly as he would speak to the uninitiated—to repeat, simply, his Kenosha lecture, 'What Pellerinism Means'; and we ought all, I think, to listen to him with the hearts of little children just as *you* will, Mr. Winterman—as if he were telling us new things, and we——"

"Alice, *dear*——" Mrs. Bain murmured with a warning gesture; and Howland Wade, emerging between the palms, took the centre of the platform.

A pang of commiseration shot through Bernald as he saw him there, so innocent and so exposed. His plump pulpy body, which made his evening dress fall into intimate and wrapper-like folds, was like a wide surface spread to the shafts of irony; and the ripples of his voice seemed to enlarge the vulnerable area as he leaned

forward, poised on confidential finger-tips, to say persuasively: "Let me try to tell you what Pellerinism means."

Bernald moved restlessly in his seat. He had the sense of being a party to something not wholly honourable. He ought not to have come; he ought not to have let his companion come. Yet how could he have done otherwise? John Pellerin's secret was his own. As long as he chose to remain John Winterman it was no one's business to gainsay him; and Bernald's scruples were really justifiable only in respect of his own presence on the scene. But even in this respect he ceased to feel them as soon as Howland Wade began to speak.

VI

It had been arranged that Pellerin, after the meeting of the Uplift Club, should join Bernald at his rooms and spend the night there, instead of returning to Portchester. The plan had been eagerly elaborated by the young man, but he had been unprepared for the alacrity with which his wonderful friend accepted it. He was beginning to see that it was a part of Pellerin's wonderfulness to fall in, quite simply and naturally, with any arrangements made for his convenience, or tending to promote the convenience of others. Bernald perceived that his docility in such matters was proportioned to the force of resistance which, for nearly half a lifetime, had kept him, with his back to the wall, fighting alone against the powers of darkness. In such a scale of values how little the small daily alternatives must weigh!

At the close of Howland Wade's discourse, Bernald, charged with his prodigious secret, had felt the need to escape for an instant from the liberated rush of talk. The interest of watching Pellerin was so perilously great that the watcher felt it might, at any moment, betray him. He lingered in the drawing-room long enough to see his friend enclosed in a mounting tide, above which Mrs. Beecher Bain and Miss Fosdick actively waved their conversational tridents; then he took refuge, at the back of the house, in a small dim library where, in

his younger days, he had discussed personal immortality and the problem of consciousness with beautiful girls whose names he could not remember.

In this retreat he surprised Mr. Beecher Bain, a quiet man with a mild brow, who was smoking a surreptitious cigar over the last number of the *Strand*. Mr. Bain, at Bernald's approach, dissembled the *Strand* under a copy of the *Hibbert Journal*, but tendered his cigar-case with the remark that stocks were heavy again; and Bernald blissfully abandoned himself to this unexpected contact with reality.

On his return to the drawing-rooms he found that the tide had set toward the supper-table, and when it finally carried him thither it was to land him in the welcoming arms of Bob Wade.

"Hullo, old man! Where have you been all this time?—Winterman? Oh, *he's* talking to Howland: yes, I managed it finally. I believe Mrs. Bain has steered them into the library, so that they shan't be disturbed. I gave her an idea of the situation, and she was awfully kind. We'd better leave them alone, don't you think? I'm trying to get a croquette for Miss Fosdick."

Bernald's secret leapt in his bosom, and he devoted himself to the task of distributing sandwiches and champagne while his pulses danced to the tune of the cosmic laughter. The vision of Pellerin and his Interpreter, face to face at last, had a Titanic grandeur that dwarfed all other comedy. "And I shall hear of it presently; in an hour or two he'll be telling me about it. And that hour will be all mine—mine and his!" The dizziness of the thought made it difficult for Bernald to preserve the balance of the supper-plates he was distributing. Life had for him at that moment the completeness which seems to defy disintegration.

The throng in the dining-room was thickening, and Bernald's efforts as purveyor were interrupted by frequent appeals, from ladies who had reached repleteness, that he should sit down and tell them all about his interesting friend. Winterman's fame, trumpeted abroad by Miss Fosdick, had reached the four corners of the Uplift Club, and

Bernald found himself fabricating *de toutes pièces* a Winterman legend which should in some degree respond to the Club's demand for the human document. When at length he had acquitted himself of this obligation, and was free to work his way back through the lessening groups into the drawing-room, he was at last rewarded by a glimpse of his friend, who, still densely encompassed, towered in the centre of the room in all his sovereign ugliness.

Their eyes met across the crowd; but Bernald gathered only perplexity from the encounter. What were Pellerin's eyes saying to him? What orders, what confidences, what indefinable apprehension did their long look impart? The young man was still trying to decipher their message when he felt a tap on the arm, and turned to meet the rueful gaze of Bob Wade, whose meaning lay clearly enough on the surface of his good blue stare.

"Well, it won't work—it won't work," the doctor groaned.

"What won't?"

"I mean with Howland. Winterman won't. Howland doesn't take to him. Says he's crude—frightfully crude. And you know Howland hates crudeness."

"Oh, I know," Bernald exulted. It was the word he had waited for—he saw it now! Once more he was lost in wonder at Howland's miraculous faculty for always, as the naturalists said, being true to type.

"So I'm afraid it's all up with his chance of writing. At least *I* can do no more," said Wade, discouraged.

Bernald pressed him for further details. "Does Winterman seem to mind much? Did you hear his version?"

"His version?"

"I mean what he said to Howland."

"Why, no. What the deuce was there for him to say?"

"What indeed? I think I'll take him home," said Bernald gaily.

He turned away to join the circle from which, a few minutes before, Pellerin's eyes had vainly and enigmatically signalled to him;

but the circle had dispersed, and Pellerin himself was not in sight.

Bernald, looking about him, saw that during his brief aside with Wade the party had passed into the final phase of dissolution. People still delayed, in diminishing groups, but the current had set toward the doors, and every moment or two it bore away a few more lingerers. Bernald, from his post, commanded the clearing perspective of the two drawing-rooms, and a rapid survey of their length sufficed to assure him that Pellerin was not in either. Taking leave of Wade, the young man made his way back to the drawing-room, where only a few hardened feasters remained, and then passed on to the library which had been the scene of the late momentous colloquy. But the library too was empty, and drifting back to the inner drawing-room Bernald found Mrs. Beecher Bain domestically putting out the candles on the mantel-piece.

“Dear Mr. Bernald! Do sit down and have a little chat. What a wonderful privilege it has been! I don’t know when I’ve had such an intense impression.”

She made way for him, in a corner of the sofa to which she had sunk; and he echoed her vaguely: “You *were* impressed, then?”

“I can’t express to you how it affected me! As Alice said, it was a resurrection—it was as if John Pellerin were actually here in the room with us!”

Bernald turned on her with a half-audible gasp. “You felt that, dear Mrs. Bain?”

“We all felt it—every one of us! I don’t wonder the Greeks—it *was* the Greeks?—regarded eloquence as a supernatural power. As Alice says, when one looked at Howland Wade one understood what they meant by the *Afflatus*.”

Bernald rose and held out his hand. “Oh, I see—it was Howland who made you feel as if Pellerin were in the room? And he made Miss Fosdick feel so too?”

“Why, of course. But why are you rushing off?”

“Because I must hunt up my friend, who’s not used to such late

hours.”

“Your friend?” Mrs. Bain had to collect her thoughts. “Oh, Mr. Winterman, you mean? But he’s gone already.”

“Gone?” Bernald exclaimed, with an odd twinge of foreboding. Remembering Pellerin’s signal across the crowd, he reproached himself for not having answered it more promptly. There had been a summons in the look—and it was certainly strange that his friend should have left the house without him.

“Are you quite sure?” he asked, with a startled glance at the clock.

“Oh, perfectly. He went half an hour ago. But you needn’t hurry away on his account, for Alice Fosdick carried him off with her. I saw them leave together.”

“Carried him off? She took him home with her, you mean?”

“Yes. You know what strange hours she keeps. She told me she was going to give him a Welsh rabbit, and explain Pellerinism to him.”

“Oh, if she’s going to explain——” Bernald murmured. But his amazement at the news struggled with a confused impatience to reach his rooms in time to be there for his friend’s arrival. There could be no stranger spectacle beneath the stars than that of John Pellerin carried off by Miss Fosdick, and listening, in the small hours, to her elucidation of his doctrines; but Bernald knew enough of his sex to be aware that such an experiment may appear less humorous to its subject than to the detached observer. Even the Uplift Club and its connotations might benefit by the attraction of the unknown; and it was conceivable that to a traveller from Mesopotamia Miss Fosdick might present elements of interest which she had lost for the frequenters of Fifth Avenue. There was, at any rate, no denying that the affair had become unexpectedly complex, and that its farther development promised to be rich in comedy.

In the contemplation of these possibilities Bernald sat over his fire, listening for Pellerin’s ring. He had arranged his modest quarters with the reverent care of a celebrant awaiting the descent of his deity. He guessed Pellerin to be careless of visual detail, but sensitive

to the happy blending of sensuous impressions: to the spell of lamplight on books, and of a deep chair placed where one could watch the fire. The chair was there, and Bernald, facing it across the hearth, already saw it filled by Pellerin's lounging figure. The autumn dawn came late, and even now they had before them the promise of some untroubled hours. Bernald, sitting there alone in the warm stillness of his room, and in the profounder hush of his expectancy, was conscious of gathering up all his sensibilities and perceptions into one exquisitely-adjusted instrument of notation. Until now he had tasted Pellerin's society only in unpremeditated snatches and had always left him with a sense, on his own part, of waste and shortcoming. Now, in the lull of this dedicated hour, he felt that he should miss nothing, and forget nothing, of the initiation that awaited him. And catching sight of Pellerin's pipe, he rose and laid it carefully on a table by the arm-chair . . .

"No. I've never had any news of him," Bernald heard himself repeating. He spoke in a low tone, and with the automatic utterance that alone made it possible to say the words.

They were addressed to Miss Fosdick, into whose neighbourhood chance had thrown him at a dinner, a year or so later than their encounter at the Uplift Club. Hitherto he had successfully, and intentionally, avoided Miss Fosdick, not from any animosity toward that unconscious instrument of fate, but from an intense reluctance to pronounce the words which he knew he should have to speak if they met.

Now, as it turned out, his chief surprise was that she should wait so long to make him speak them. All through the dinner she had swept him along on a rapid current of talk which showed no tendency to linger or turn back upon the past. At first he ascribed her reserve to a sense of delicacy with which he reproached himself for not having credited her; then he saw that she had been carried so far beyond the point at which they had last faced each other, that she

was finally borne back to it only by the merest hazard of associated ideas. For it appeared that the very next evening, at Mrs. Beecher Bain's, a Hindu Mahatma was to lecture to the Uplift Club on the Limits of the Subliminal; and it was owing to no less a person than Howland Wade that this exceptional privilege had been obtained.

"Of course Howland's known all over the world as the interpreter of Pellerinism, and the Aga Gautch, who had absolutely declined to speak anywhere in public, wrote to Isabella that he could not refuse anything that Mr. Wade asked. Did you know that Howland's lecture, 'What Pellerinism Means,' has been translated into twenty-two languages, and gone into a fifth edition in Icelandic? Why, that reminds me," Miss Fosdick broke off—"I've never heard what became of your queer friend—what was his name?—whom you and Bob Wade accused me of spiriting away the night that Howland gave that very lecture at Hatty Bain's. And I've never seen *you* since you rushed into the house the next morning, and dragged me out of bed to know what I'd done with him!"

With a sharp effort Bernald gathered himself together to have it out. "Well, what *did* you do with him?" he retorted.

She laughed her appreciation of his humour. "Just what I told you, of course. I said good-bye to him on Isabella's door-step."

Bernald looked at her. "It's really true, then, that he didn't go home with you?"

She bantered back: "Have you suspected me, all this time, of hiding his remains in the cellar?" And with a droop of her fine lids she added: "I wish he *had* come home with me, for he was rather interesting, and there were things about Pellerinism that I think I could have explained to him."

Bernald helped himself to a nectarine, and Miss Fosdick continued on a note of amused curiosity: "So you've really never had any news of him since that night?"

"No—I've never had any news of him."

"Not the least little message?"

"Not the least little message."

"Or a rumour or report of any kind?"

"Or a rumour or report of any kind."

Miss Fosdick's interest seemed to be revived by the undeniable strangeness of the case. "It's rather creepy, isn't it? What *could* have happened? You don't suppose he could have been waylaid and murdered?" she asked with brightening eyes.

Bernald shook his head serenely. "No. I'm sure he's safe—quite safe."

"But if you're sure, you must know something."

"No. I know nothing," he repeated.

She scanned him incredulously. "But what's your theory—for you must have a theory? What in the world can have become of him?"

Bernald returned her look and hesitated. "Do you happen to remember the last thing he said to you—the very last, on the doorstep, when he left you?"

"The last thing?" She poised her fork above the peach on her plate. "I don't think he said anything. Oh, yes—when I reminded him that he'd solemnly promised to come back with me and have a little talk he said he couldn't because he was going home."

"Well, then, I suppose," said Bernald, "he went home."

She glanced at him as if suspecting a trap. "Dear me, how flat! I always inclined to a mysterious murder. But of course you know more of him than you say."

She began to cut her peach, but paused above a lifted bit to ask, with a renewal of animation in her expressive eyes: "By the way, had you heard that Howland Wade has been gradually getting farther and farther away from Pellerinism? It seems he's begun to feel that there's a Positivist element in it which is narrowing to any one who has gone at all deeply into the Wisdom of the East. He was intensely interesting about it the other day, and of course I *do* see what he feels. . . Oh, it's too long to tell you now; but if you could manage to come in to tea some afternoon soon—any day but Wednesday—I

should so like to explain——”

The Eyes

WE HAD BEEN put in the mood for ghosts, that evening, after an excellent dinner at our old friend Culwin's, by a tale of Fred Murchard's—the narrative of a strange personal visitation.

Seen through the haze of our cigars, and by the drowsy gleam of a coal fire, Culwin's library, with its oak walls and dark old bindings, made a good setting for such evocations; and ghostly experiences at first hand being, after Murchard's opening, the only kind acceptable to us, we proceeded to take stock of our group and tax each member for a contribution. There were eight of us, and seven contrived, in a manner more or less adequate, to fulfil the condition imposed. It surprised us all to find that we could muster such a show of supernatural impressions, for none of us, excepting Murchard himself and young Phil Frenham—whose story was the slightest of the lot—had the habit of sending our souls into the invisible. So that, on the whole, we had every reason to be proud of our seven “exhibits,” and none of us would have dreamed of expecting an eighth from our host.

Our old friend, Mr. Andrew Culwin, who had sat back in his arm-chair, listening and blinking through the smoke circles with the cheerful tolerance of a wise old idol, was not the kind of man likely to be favoured with such contacts, though he had imagination enough to enjoy, without envying, the superior privileges of his guests. By age and by education he belonged to the stout Positivist tradition, and his habit of thought had been formed in the days of the epic struggle between physics and metaphysics. But he had been,

then and always, essentially a spectator, a humorous detached observer of the immense muddled variety show of life, slipping out of his seat now and then for a brief dip into the convivialities at the back of the house, but never, as far as one knew, showing the least desire to jump on the stage and do a "turn."

Among his contemporaries there lingered a vague tradition of his having, at a remote period, and in a romantic clime, been wounded in a duel; but this legend no more tallied with what we younger men knew of his character than my mother's assertion that he had once been "a charming little man with nice eyes" corresponded to any possible reconstitution of his physiognomy.

"He never can have looked like anything but a bundle of sticks," Murchard had once said of him. "Or a phosphorescent log, rather," some one else amended; and we recognised the happiness of this description of his small squat trunk, with the red blink of the eyes in a face like mottled bark. He had always been possessed of a leisure which he had nursed and protected, instead of squandering it in vain activities. His carefully guarded hours had been devoted to the cultivation of a fine intelligence and a few judiciously chosen habits; and none of the disturbances common to human experience seemed to have crossed his sky. Nevertheless, his dispassionate survey of the universe had not raised his opinion of that costly experiment, and his study of the human race seemed to have resulted in the conclusion that all men were superfluous, and women necessary only because some one had to do the cooking. On the importance of this point his convictions were absolute, and gastronomy was the only science which he revered as a dogma. It must be owned that his little dinners were a strong argument in favour of this view, besides being a reason—though not the main one—for the fidelity of his friends.

Mentally he exercised a hospitality less seductive but no less stimulating. His mind was like a forum, or some open meeting-place for the exchange of ideas: somewhat cold and draughty, but light, spacious and orderly—a kind of academic grove from which all the

leaves have fallen. In this privileged area a dozen of us were wont to stretch our muscles and expand our lungs; and, as if to prolong as much as possible the tradition of what we felt to be a vanishing institution, one or two neophytes were now and then added to our band.

Young Phil Frenham was the last, and the most interesting, of these recruits, and a good example of Murchard's somewhat morbid assertion that our old friend "liked 'em juicy." It was indeed a fact that Culwin, for all his dryness, specially tasted the lyric qualities in youth. As he was far too good an Epicurean to nip the flowers of soul which he gathered for his garden, his friendship was not a disintegrating influence: on the contrary, it forced the young idea to robuster bloom. And in Phil Frenham he had a good subject for experimentation. The boy was really intelligent, and the soundness of his nature was like the pure paste under a fine glaze. Culwin had fished him out of a fog of family dulness, and pulled him up to a peak in Darien; and the adventure hadn't hurt him a bit. Indeed, the skill with which Culwin had contrived to stimulate his curiosities without robbing them of their bloom of awe seemed to me a sufficient answer to Murchard's ogreish metaphor. There was nothing hectic in Frenham's efflorescence, and his old friend had not laid even a finger-tip on the sacred stupidities. One wanted no better proof of that than the fact that Frenham still revered them in Culwin.

"There's a side of him you fellows don't see. *I* believe that story about the duel!" he declared; and it was of the very essence of this belief that it should impel him—just as our little party was dispersing—to turn back to our host with the joking demand: "And now you've got to tell us about *your* ghost!"

The outer door had closed on Murchard and the others; only Frenham and I remained; and the devoted servant who presided over Culwin's destinies, having brought a fresh supply of soda-water, had been laconically ordered to bed.

Culwin's sociability was a night-blooming flower, and we knew that he expected the nucleus of his group to tighten around him after midnight. But Frenham's appeal seemed to disconcert him comically, and he rose from the chair in which he had just reseated himself after his farewells in the hall.

"My ghost? Do you suppose I'm fool enough to go to the expense of keeping one of my own, when there are so many charming ones in my friends' closets?—Take another cigar," he said, revolving toward me with a laugh.

Frenham laughed too, pulling up his slender height before the chimney-piece as he turned to face his short bristling friend.

"Oh," he said, "you'd never be content to share if you met one you really liked."

Culwin had dropped back into his arm-chair, his shock head embedded in the hollow of worn leather, his little eyes glimmering over a fresh cigar.

"Liked—*liked*? Good Lord!" he growled.

"Ah, you *have*, then!" Frenham pounced on him in the same instant, with a side-glance of victory at me; but Culwin cowered gnomelike among his cushions, dissembling himself in a protective cloud of smoke.

"What's the use of denying it? You've seen everything, so of course you've seen a ghost!" his young friend persisted, talking intrepidly into the cloud. "Or, if you haven't seen one, it's only because you've seen two!"

The form of the challenge seemed to strike our host. He shot his head out of the mist with a queer tortoise-like motion he sometimes had, and blinked approvingly at Frenham.

"That's it," he flung at us on a shrill jerk of laughter; "it's only because I've seen two!"

The words were so unexpected that they dropped down and down into a deep silence, while we continued to stare at each other over Culwin's head, and Culwin stared at his ghosts. At length Frenham,

without speaking, threw himself into the chair on the other side of the hearth, and leaned forward with his listening smile . . .

II

“Oh, of course they’re not show ghosts—a collector wouldn’t think anything of them . . . Don’t let me raise your hopes . . . their one merit is their numerical strength: the exceptional fact of their being *two*. But, as against this, I’m bound to admit that at any moment I could probably have exorcised them both by asking my doctor for a prescription, or my oculist for a pair of spectacles. Only, as I never could make up my mind whether to go to the doctor or the oculist—whether I was afflicted by an optical or a digestive delusion—I left them to pursue their interesting double life, though at times they made mine exceedingly uncomfortable . . .

“Yes—uncomfortable; and you know how I hate to be uncomfortable! But it was part of my stupid pride, when the thing began, not to admit that I could be disturbed by the trifling matter of seeing two——

“And then I’d no reason, really, to suppose I was ill. As far as I knew I was simply bored—horribly bored. But it was part of my boredom—I remember—that I was feeling so uncommonly well, and didn’t know how on earth to work off my surplus energy. I had come back from a long journey—down in South America and Mexico—and had settled down for the winter near New York, with an old aunt who had known Washington Irving and corresponded with N. P. Willis. She lived, not far from Irvington, in a damp Gothic villa, overhung by Norway spruces, and looking exactly like a memorial emblem done in hair. Her personal appearance was in keeping with this image, and her own hair—of which there was little left—might have been sacrificed to the manufacture of the emblem.

“I had just reached the end of an agitated year, with considerable arrears to make up in money and emotion; and theoretically it seemed as though my aunt’s mild hospitality would be as beneficial

to my nerves as to my purse. But the deuce of it was that as soon as I felt myself safe and sheltered my energy began to revive; and how was I to work it off inside of a memorial emblem? I had, at that time, the illusion that sustained intellectual effort could engage a man's whole activity; and I decided to write a great book—I forget about what. My aunt, impressed by my plan, gave up to me her Gothic library, filled with classics bound in black cloth and daguerreotypes of faded celebrities; and I sat down at my desk to win myself a place among their number. And to facilitate my task she lent me a cousin to copy my manuscript.

“The cousin was a nice girl, and I had an idea that a nice girl was just what I needed to restore my faith in human nature, and principally in myself. She was neither beautiful nor intelligent—poor Alice Nowell!—but it interested me to see any woman content to be so uninteresting, and I wanted to find out the secret of her content. In doing this I handled it rather rashly, and put it out of joint—oh, just for a moment! There's no fatuity in telling you this, for the poor girl had never seen any one but cousins . . .

“Well, I was sorry for what I'd done, of course, and confoundedly bothered as to how I should put it straight. She was staying in the house, and one evening, after my aunt had gone to bed, she came down to the library to fetch a book she'd mislaid, like any artless heroine on the shelves behind us. She was pink-nosed and flustered, and it suddenly occurred to me that her hair, though it was fairly thick and pretty, would look exactly like my aunt's when she grew older. I was glad I had noticed this, for it made it easier for me to decide to do what was right; and when I had found the book she hadn't lost I told her I was leaving for Europe that week.

“Europe was terribly far off in those days, and Alice knew at once what I meant. She didn't take it in the least as I'd expected—it would have been easier if she had. She held her book very tight, and turned away a moment to wind up the lamp on my desk—it had a ground glass shade with vine leaves, and glass drops around the edge, I

remember. Then she came back, held out her hand, and said: 'Good-bye.' And as she said it she looked straight at me and kissed me. I had never felt anything as fresh and shy and brave as her kiss. It was worse than any reproach, and it made me ashamed to deserve a reproach from her. I said to myself: 'I'll marry her, and when my aunt dies she'll leave us this house, and I'll sit here at the desk and go on with my book; and Alice will sit over there with her embroidery and look at me as she's looking now. And life will go on like that for any number of years.' The prospect frightened me a little, but at the time it didn't frighten me as much as doing anything to hurt her; and ten minutes later she had my seal ring on her finger, and my promise that when I went abroad she should go with me.

"You'll wonder why I'm enlarging on this incident. It's because the evening on which it took place was the very evening on which I first saw the queer sight I've spoken of. Being at that time an ardent believer in a necessary sequence between cause and effect I naturally tried to trace some kind of link between what had just happened to me in my aunt's library, and what was to happen a few hours later on the same night; and so the coincidence between the two events always remained in my mind.

"I went up to bed with rather a heavy heart, for I was bowed under the weight of the first good action I had ever consciously committed; and young as I was, I saw the gravity of my situation. Don't imagine from this that I had hitherto been an instrument of destruction. I had been merely a harmless young man, who had followed his bent and declined all collaboration with Providence. Now I had suddenly undertaken to promote the moral order of the world, and I felt a good deal like the trustful spectator who has given his gold watch to the conjurer, and doesn't know in what shape he'll get it back when the trick is over . . . Still, a glow of self-righteousness tempered my fears, and I said to myself as I undressed that when I'd got used to being good it probably wouldn't make me as nervous as it did at the start. And by the time I was in bed, and had blown out my candle, I

felt that I really *was* getting used to it, and that, as far as I'd got, it was not unlike sinking down into one of my aunt's very softest wool mattresses.

"I closed my eyes on this image, and when I opened them it must have been a good deal later, for my room had grown cold, and intensely still. I was waked by the queer feeling we all know—the feeling that there was something in the room that hadn't been there when I fell asleep. I sat up and strained my eyes into the darkness. The room was pitch black, and at first I saw nothing; but gradually a vague glimmer at the foot of the bed turned into two eyes staring back at me. I couldn't distinguish the features attached to them, but as I looked the eyes grew more and more distinct: they gave out a light of their own.

"The sensation of being thus gazed at was far from pleasant, and you might suppose that my first impulse would have been to jump out of bed and hurl myself on the invisible figure attached to the eyes. But it wasn't—my impulse was simply to lie still . . . I can't say whether this was due to an immediate sense of the uncanny nature of the apparition—to the certainty that if I did jump out of bed I should hurl myself on nothing—or merely to the benumbing effect of the eyes themselves. They were the very worst eyes I've ever seen: a man's eyes—but what a man! My first thought was that he must be frightfully old. The orbits were sunk, and the thick red-lined lids hung over the eyeballs like blinds of which the cords are broken. One lid drooped a little lower than the other, with the effect of a crooked leer; and between these folds of flesh, with their scant bristle of lashes, the eyes themselves, small glassy disks with an agate-like rim, looked like sea-pebbles in the grip of a star-fish.

"But the age of the eyes was not the most unpleasant thing about them. What turned me sick was their expression of vicious security. I don't know how else to describe the fact that they seemed to belong to a man who had done a lot of harm in his life, but had always kept just inside the danger lines. They were not the eyes of a coward, but

of some one much too clever to take risks; and my gorge rose at their look of base astuteness. Yet even that wasn't the worst; for as we continued to scan each other I saw in them a tinge of derision, and felt myself to be its object.

"At that I was seized by an impulse of rage that jerked me to my feet and pitched me straight at the unseen figure. But of course there wasn't any figure there, and my fists struck at emptiness. Ashamed and cold, I groped about for a match and lit the candles. The room looked just as usual—as I had known it would; and I crawled back to bed, and blew out the lights.

"As soon as the room was dark again the eyes reappeared; and I now applied myself to explaining them on scientific principles. At first I thought the illusion might have been caused by the glow of the last embers in the chimney; but the fireplace was on the other side of my bed, and so placed that the fire could not be reflected in my toilet glass, which was the only mirror in the room. Then it struck me that I might have been tricked by the reflection of the embers in some polished bit of wood or metal; and though I couldn't discover any object of the sort in my line of vision, I got up again, groped my way to the hearth, and covered what was left of the fire. But as soon as I was back in bed the eyes were back at its foot.

"They were an hallucination, then: that was plain. But the fact that they were not due to any external dupery didn't make them a bit pleasanter. For if they were a projection of my inner consciousness, what the deuce was the matter with that organ? I had gone deeply enough into the mystery of morbid pathological states to picture the conditions under which an exploring mind might lay itself open to such a midnight admonition; but I couldn't fit it to my present case. I had never felt more normal, mentally and physically; and the only unusual fact in my situation—that of having assured the happiness of an amiable girl—did not seem of a kind to summon unclean spirits about my pillow. But there were the eyes still looking at me . . .

"I shut mine, and tried to evoke a vision of Alice Nowell's. They

were not remarkable eyes, but they were as wholesome as fresh water, and if she had had more imagination—or longer lashes—their expression might have been interesting. As it was, they did not prove very efficacious, and in a few moments I perceived that they had mysteriously changed into the eyes at the foot of the bed. It exasperated me more to feel these glaring at me through my shut lids than to see them, and I opened my eyes again and looked straight into their hateful stare . . .

“And so it went on all night. I can’t tell you what that night was like, nor how long it lasted. Have you ever lain in bed, hopelessly wide awake, and tried to keep your eyes shut, knowing that if you opened ’em you’d see something you dreaded and loathed? It sounds easy, but it’s devilish hard. Those eyes hung there and drew me. I had the *vertige de l’abîme*, and their red lids were the edge of my abyss. . . I had known nervous hours before: hours when I’d felt the wind of danger in my neck; but never this kind of strain. It wasn’t that the eyes were awful; they hadn’t the majesty of the powers of darkness. But they had—how shall I say?—a physical effect that was the equivalent of a bad smell: their look left a smear like a snail’s. And I didn’t see what business they had with me, anyhow—and I stared and stared, trying to find out . . .

“I don’t know what effect they were trying to produce; but the effect they *did* produce was that of making me pack my portmanteau and bolt to town early the next morning. I left a note for my aunt, explaining that I was ill and had gone to see my doctor; and as a matter of fact I did feel uncommonly ill—the night seemed to have pumped all the blood out of me. But when I reached town I didn’t go to the doctor’s. I went to a friend’s rooms, and threw myself on a bed, and slept for ten heavenly hours. When I woke it was the middle of the night, and I turned cold at the thought of what might be waiting for me. I sat up, shaking, and stared into the darkness; but there wasn’t a break in its blessed surface, and when I saw that the eyes were not there I dropped back into another long sleep.

"I had left no word for Alice when I fled, because I meant to go back the next morning. But the next morning I was too exhausted to stir. As the day went on the exhaustion increased, instead of wearing off like the fatigue left by an ordinary night of insomnia: the effect of the eyes seemed to be cumulative, and the thought of seeing them again grew intolerable. For two days I fought my dread; and on the third evening I pulled myself together and decided to go back the next morning. I felt a good deal happier as soon as I'd decided, for I knew that my abrupt disappearance, and the strangeness of my not writing, must have been very distressing to poor Alice. I went to bed with an easy mind, and fell asleep at once; but in the middle of the night I woke, and there were the eyes . . .

"Well, I simply couldn't face them; and instead of going back to my aunt's I bundled a few things into a trunk and jumped aboard the first steamer for England. I was so dead tired when I got on board that I crawled straight into my berth, and slept most of the way over; and I can't tell you the bliss it was to wake from those long dreamless stretches and look fearlessly into the dark, *knowing* that I shouldn't see the eyes . . .

"I stayed abroad for a year, and then I stayed for another; and during that time I never had a glimpse of them. That was enough reason for prolonging my stay if I'd been on a desert island. Another was, of course, that I had perfectly come to see, on the voyage over, the complete impossibility of my marrying Alice Nowell. The fact that I had been so slow in making this discovery annoyed me, and made me want to avoid explanations. The bliss of escaping at one stroke from the eyes, and from this other embarrassment, gave my freedom an extraordinary zest; and the longer I savoured it the better I liked its taste.

"The eyes had burned such a hole in my consciousness that for a long time I went on puzzling over the nature of the apparition, and wondering if it would ever come back. But as time passed I lost this dread, and retained only the precision of the image. Then that faded

in its turn.

“The second year found me settled in Rome, where I was planning, I believe, to write another great book—a definitive work on Etruscan influences in Italian art. At any rate, I’d found some pretext of the kind for taking a sunny apartment in the Piazza di Spagna and dabbling about in the Forum; and there, one morning, a charming youth came to me. As he stood there in the warm light, slender and smooth and hyacinthine, he might have stepped from a ruined altar—one to Antinous, say; but he’d come instead from New York, with a letter (of all people) from Alice Nowell. The letter—the first I’d had from her since our break—was simply a line introducing her young cousin, Gilbert Noyes, and appealing to me to befriend him. It appeared, poor lad, that he ‘had talent,’ and ‘wanted to write’; and, an obdurate family having insisted that his calligraphy should take the form of double entry, Alice had intervened to win him six months’ respite, during which he was to travel abroad on a meagre pittance, and somehow prove his ability to increase it by his pen. The quaint conditions of the test struck me first: it seemed about as conclusive as a mediæval ‘ordeal.’ Then I was touched by her having sent him to me. I had always wanted to do her some service, to justify myself in my own eyes rather than hers; and here was a beautiful occasion.

“I imagine it’s safe to lay down the general principle that predestined geniuses don’t, as a rule, appear before one in the spring sunshine of the Forum looking like one of its banished gods. At any rate, poor Noyes wasn’t a predestined genius. But he *was* beautiful to see, and charming as a comrade. It was only when he began to talk literature that my heart failed me. I knew all the symptoms so well—the things he had ‘in him,’ and the things outside him that impinged! There’s the real test, after all. It was always—punctually, inevitably, with the inexorableness of a mechanical law—it was *always* the wrong thing that struck him. I grew to find a certain fascination in deciding in advance exactly which wrong thing he’d select; and I

acquired an astonishing skill at the game . . .

“The worst of it was that his *bêtise* wasn’t of the too obvious sort. Ladies who met him at picnics thought him intellectual; and even at dinners he passed for clever. I, who had him under the microscope, fancied now and then that he might develop some kind of a slim talent, something that he could make ‘do’ and be happy on; and wasn’t that, after all, what I was concerned with? He was so charming—he continued to be so charming—that he called forth all my charity in support of this argument; and for the first few months I really believed there was a chance for him . . .

“Those months were delightful. Noyes was constantly with me, and the more I saw of him the better I liked him. His stupidity was a natural grace—it was as beautiful, really, as his eyelashes. And he was so gay, so affectionate, and so happy with me, that telling him the truth would have been about as pleasant as slitting the throat of some gentle animal. At first I used to wonder what had put into that radiant head the detestable delusion that it held a brain. Then I began to see that it was simply protective mimicry—an instinctive ruse to get away from family life and an office desk. Not that Gilbert didn’t—dear lad!—believe in himself. There wasn’t a trace of hypocrisy in him. He was sure that his ‘call’ was irresistible, while to me it was the saving grace of his situation that it *wasn’t*, and that a little money, a little leisure, a little pleasure would have turned him into an inoffensive idler. Unluckily, however, there was no hope of money, and with the alternative of the office desk before him he couldn’t postpone his attempt at literature. The stuff he turned out was deplorable, and I see now that I knew it from the first. Still, the absurdity of deciding a man’s whole future on a first trial seemed to justify me in withholding my verdict, and perhaps even in encouraging him a little, on the ground that the human plant generally needs warmth to flower.

“At any rate, I proceeded on that principle, and carried it to the point of getting his term of probation extended. When I left Rome he

went with me, and we idled away a delicious summer between Capri and Venice. I said to myself: 'If he has anything in him, it will come out now', and it *did*. He was never more enchanting and enchanted. There were moments of our pilgrimage when beauty born of murmuring sound seemed actually to pass into his face—but only to issue forth in a flood of the palest ink . . .

"Well, the time came to turn off the tap; and I knew there was no hand but mine to do it. We were back in Rome, and I had taken him to stay with me, not wanting him to be alone in his *pension* when he had to face the necessity of renouncing his ambition. I hadn't, of course, relied solely on my own judgment in deciding to advise him to drop literature. I had sent his stuff to various people—editors and critics—and they had always sent it back with the same chilling lack of comment. Really there was nothing on earth to say——

"I confess I never felt more shabbily than I did on the day when I decided to have it out with Gilbert. It was well enough to tell myself that it was my duty to knock the poor boy's hopes into splinters—but I'd like to know what act of gratuitous cruelty hasn't been justified on that plea? I've always shrunk from usurping the functions of Providence, and when I have to exercise them I decidedly prefer that it shouldn't be on an errand of destruction. Besides, in the last issue, who was I to decide, even after a year's trial, if poor Gilbert had it in him or not?

"The more I looked at the part I'd resolved to play, the less I liked it; and I liked it still less when Gilbert sat opposite me, with his head thrown back in the lamplight, just as Phil's is now . . . I'd been going over his last manuscript, and he knew it, and he knew that his future hung on my verdict—we'd tacitly agreed to that. The manuscript lay between us, on my table—a novel, his first novel, if you please!—and he reached over and laid his hand on it, and looked up at me with all his life in the look.

"I stood up and cleared my throat, trying to keep my eyes away from his face and on the manuscript.

“ ‘The fact is, my dear Gilbert,’ I began——

“I saw him turn pale, but he was up and facing me in an instant.

“ ‘Oh, look here, don’t take on so, my dear fellow! I’m not so awfully cut up as all that!’ His hands were on my shoulders, and he was laughing down on me from his full height, with a kind of mortally-stricken gaiety that drove the knife into my side.

“He was too beautifully brave for me to keep up any humbug about my duty. And it came over me suddenly how I should hurt others in hurting him: myself first, since sending him home meant losing him; but more particularly poor Alice Nowell, to whom I had so longed to prove my good faith and my desire to serve her. It really seemed like failing her twice to fail Gilbert——

“But my intuition was like one of those lightning flashes that encircle the whole horizon, and in the same instant I saw what I might be letting myself in for if I didn’t tell the truth. I said to myself: ‘I shall have him for life’—and I’d never yet seen any one, man or woman, whom I was quite sure of wanting on those terms. Well, this impulse of egotism decided me. I was ashamed of it, and to get away from it I took a leap that landed me straight in Gilbert’s arms.

“ ‘The thing’s all right, and you’re all wrong!’ I shouted up at him; and as he hugged me, and I laughed and shook in his clutch, I had for a minute the sense of self-complacency that is supposed to attend the footsteps of the just. Hang it all, making people happy *has* its charms——

“Gilbert, of course, was for celebrating his emancipation in some spectacular manner; but I sent him away alone to explode his emotions, and went to bed to sleep off mine. As I undressed I began to wonder what their after-taste would be—so many of the finest don’t keep! Still, I wasn’t sorry, and I meant to empty the bottle, even if it *did* turn a trifle flat.

“After I got into bed I lay for a long time smiling at the memory of his eyes—his blissful eyes. . . Then I fell asleep, and when I woke the

room was deathly cold, and I sat up with a jerk—and there were *the other eyes* . . .

“It was three years since I’d seen them, but I’d thought of them so often that I fancied they could never take me unawares again. Now, with their red sneer on me, I knew that I had never really believed they would come back, and that I was as defenceless as ever against them . . . As before, it was the insane irrelevance of their coming that made it so horrible. What the deuce were they after, to leap out at me at such a time? I had lived more or less carelessly in the years since I’d seen them, though my worst indiscretions were not dark enough to invite the searchings of their infernal glare; but at this particular moment I was really in what might have been called a state of grace; and I can’t tell you how the fact added to their horror . . .

“But it’s not enough to say they were as bad as before: they were worse. Worse by just so much as I’d learned of life in the interval; by all the damnable implications my wider experience read into them. I saw now what I hadn’t seen before: that they were eyes which had grown hideous gradually, which had built up their baseness coral-wise, bit by bit, out of a series of small turpitudes slowly accumulated through the industrious years. Yes—it came to me that what made them so bad was that they’d grown bad so slowly . . .

“There they hung in the darkness, their swollen lids dropped across the little watery bulbs rolling loose in the orbits, and the puff of flesh making a muddy shadow underneath—and as their stare moved with my movements, there came over me a sense of their tacit complicity, of a deep hidden understanding between us that was worse than the first shock of their strangeness. Not that I understood them; but that they made it so clear that some day I should . . . Yes, that was the worst part of it, decidedly; and it was the feeling that became stronger each time they came back . . .

“For they got into the damnable habit of coming back. They reminded me of vampires with a taste for young flesh, they seemed

so to gloat over the taste of a good conscience. Every night for a month they came to claim their morsel of mine: since I'd made Gilbert happy they simply wouldn't loosen their fangs. The coincidence almost made me hate him, poor lad, fortuitous as I felt it to be. I puzzled over it a good deal, but couldn't find any hint of an explanation except in the chance of his association with Alice Nowell. But then the eyes had let up on me the moment I had abandoned her, so they could hardly be the emissaries of a woman scorned, even if one could have pictured poor Alice charging such spirits to avenge her. That set me thinking, and I began to wonder if they would let up on me if I abandoned Gilbert. The temptation was insidious, and I had to stiffen myself against it; but really, dear boy! he was too charming to be sacrificed to such demons. And so, after all, I never found out what they wanted . . .”

III

The fire crumbled, sending up a flash which threw into relief the narrator's gnarled face under its grey-black stubble. Pressed into the hollow of the chair-back, it stood out an instant like an intaglio of yellowish red-veined stone, with spots of enamel for the eyes; then the fire sank and it became once more a dim Rembrandtish blur.

Phil Frenham, sitting in a low chair on the opposite side of the hearth, one long arm propped on the table behind him, one hand supporting his thrown-back head, and his eyes fixed on his old friend's face, had not moved since the tale began. He continued to maintain his silent immobility after Culwin had ceased to speak, and it was I who, with a vague sense of disappointment at the sudden drop of the story, finally asked: “But how long did you keep on seeing them?”

Culwin, so sunk into his chair that he seemed like a heap of his own empty clothes, stirred a little, as if in surprise at my question. He appeared to have half-forgotten what he had been telling us.

“How long? Oh, off and on all that winter. It was infernal. I never got used to them. I grew really ill.”

Frenham shifted his attitude, and as he did so his elbow struck against a small mirror in a bronze frame standing on the table behind him. He turned and changed its angle slightly; then he resumed his former attitude, his dark head thrown back on his lifted palm, his eyes intent on Culwin’s face. Something in his silent gaze embarrassed me, and as if to divert attention from it I pressed on with another question:

“And you never tried sacrificing Noyes?”

“Oh, no. The fact is I didn’t have to. He did it for me, poor boy!”

“Did it for you? How do you mean?”

“He wore me out—wore everybody out. He kept on pouring out his lamentable twaddle, and hawking it up and down the place till he became a thing of terror. I tried to wean him from writing—oh, ever so gently, you understand, by throwing him with agreeable people, giving him a chance to make himself felt, to come to a sense of what he *really* had to give. I’d foreseen this solution from the beginning—felt sure that, once the first ardour of authorship was quenched, he’d drop into his place as a charming parasitic thing, the kind of chronic Cherubino for whom, in old societies, there’s always a seat at table, and a shelter behind the ladies’ skirts. I saw him take his place as ‘the poet’: the poet who doesn’t write. One knows the type in every drawing-room. Living in that way doesn’t cost much—I’d worked it all out in my mind, and felt sure that, with a little help, he could manage it for the next few years; and meanwhile he’d be sure to marry. I saw him married to a widow, rather older, with a good cook and a well-run house. And I actually had my eye on the widow . . . Meanwhile I did everything to help the transition—lent him money to ease his conscience, introduced him to pretty women to make him forget his vows. But nothing would do him: he had but one idea in his beautiful obstinate head. He wanted the laurel and not the rose, and he kept on repeating Gautier’s axiom, and battering and filing at

his limp prose till he'd spread it out over Lord knows how many hundred pages. Now and then he would send a barrelful to a publisher, and of course it would always come back.

"At first it didn't matter—he thought he was 'misunderstood.' He took the attitudes of genius, and whenever an opus came home he wrote another to keep it company. Then he had a reaction of despair, and accused me of deceiving him, and Lord knows what. I got angry at that, and told him it was he who had deceived himself. He'd come to me determined to write, and I'd done my best to help him. That was the extent of my offence, and I'd done it for his cousin's sake, not his.

"That seemed to strike home, and he didn't answer for a minute. Then he said: 'My time's up and my money's up. What do you think I'd better do?'

" 'I think you'd better not be an ass,' I said.

" 'What do you mean by being an ass?' he asked.

"I took a letter from my desk and held it out to him.

" 'I mean refusing this offer of Mrs. Ellinger's: to be her secretary at a salary of five thousand dollars. There may be a lot more in it than that.'

"He flung out his hand with a violence that struck the letter from mine. 'Oh, I know well enough what's in it!' he said, red to the roots of his hair.

" 'And what's the answer, if you know?' I asked.

"He made none at the minute, but turned away slowly to the door. There, with his hand on the threshold, he stopped to say, almost under his breath: 'Then you really think my stuff's no good?'

"I was tired and exasperated, and I laughed. I don't defend my laugh—it was in wretched taste. But I must plead in extenuation that the boy was a fool, and that I'd done my best for him—I really had.

"He went out of the room, shutting the door quietly after him. That afternoon I left for Frascati, where I'd promised to spend the Sunday with some friends. I was glad to escape from Gilbert, and by

the same token, as I learned that night, I had also escaped from the eyes. I dropped into the same lethargic sleep that had come to me before when I left off seeing them; and when I woke the next morning, in my peaceful room above the ilexes, I felt the utter weariness and deep relief that always followed on that sleep. I put in two blessed nights at Frascati, and when I got back to my rooms in Rome I found that Gilbert had gone . . . Oh, nothing tragic had happened—the episode never rose to *that*. He'd simply packed his manuscripts and left for America—for his family and the Wall Street desk. He left a decent enough note to tell me of his decision, and behaved altogether, in the circumstances, as little like a fool as it's possible for a fool to behave . . .”

IV

Culwin paused again, and Frenham still sat motionless, the dusky contour of his young head reflected in the mirror at his back.

“And what became of Noyes afterward?” I finally asked, still disquieted by a sense of incompleteness, by the need of some connecting thread between the parallel lines of the tale.

Culwin twitched his shoulders. “Oh, nothing became of him—because he became nothing. There could be no question of ‘becoming’ about it. He vegetated in an office, I believe, and finally got a clerkship in a consulate, and married drearily in China. I saw him once in Hong Kong, years afterward. He was fat and hadn’t shaved. I was told he drank. He didn’t recognise me.”

“And the eyes?” I asked, after another pause which Frenham’s continued silence made oppressive.

Culwin, stroking his chin, blinked at me meditatively through the shadows. “I never saw them after my last talk with Gilbert. Put two and two together if you can. For my part, I haven’t found the link.”

He rose, his hands in his pockets, and walked stiffly over to the table on which reviving drinks had been set out.

“You must be parched after this dry tale. Here, help yourself, my

dear fellow. Here, Phil——” He turned back to the hearth.

Frenham made no response to his host’s hospitable summons. He still sat in his low chair without moving, but as Culwin advanced toward him, their eyes met in a long look; after which the young man, turning suddenly, flung his arms across the table behind him, and dropped his face upon them.

Culwin, at the unexpected gesture, stopped short, a flush on his face.

“Phil—what the deuce? Why, have the eyes scared *you*? My dear boy—my dear fellow—I never had such a tribute to my literary ability, never!”

He broke into a chuckle at the thought, and halted on the hearth-rug, his hands still in his pockets, gazing down at the youth’s bowed head. Then, as Frenham still made no answer, he moved a step or two nearer.

“Cheer up, my dear Phil! It’s years since I’ve seen them—apparently I’ve done nothing lately bad enough to call them out of chaos. Unless my present evocation of them has made *you* see them; which would be their worst stroke yet!”

His bantering appeal quivered off into an uneasy laugh, and he moved still nearer, bending over Frenham, and laying his gouty hands on the lad’s shoulders.

“Phil, my dear boy, really—what’s the matter? Why don’t you answer? *Have* you seen the eyes?”

Frenham’s face was still hidden, and from where I stood behind Culwin I saw the latter, as if under the rebuff of this unaccountable attitude, draw back slowly from his friend. As he did so, the light of the lamp on the table fell full on his congested face, and I caught its reflection in the mirror behind Frenham’s head.

Culwin saw the reflection also. He paused, his face level with the mirror, as if scarcely recognising the countenance in it as his own. But as he looked his expression gradually changed, and for an appreciable space of time he and the image in the glass confronted

each other with a glare of slowly gathering hate. Then Culwin let go on Frenham's shoulders, and drew back a step . . .

Frenham, his face still hidden, did not stir.

Afterward

OH, there *is* one, of course, but you'll never know it."

The assertion, laughingly flung out six months earlier in a bright June garden, came back to Mary Boyne with a new perception of its significance as she stood, in the December dusk, waiting for the lamps to be brought into the library.

The words had been spoken by their friend Alida Stair, as they sat at tea on her lawn at Pangbourne, in reference to the very house of which the library in question was the central, the pivotal "feature." Mary Boyne and her husband, in quest of a country place in one of the southern or southwestern counties, had, on their arrival in England, carried their problem straight to Alida Stair, who had successfully solved it in her own case; but it was not until they had rejected, almost capriciously, several practical and judicious suggestions that she threw out: "Well, there's Lyng, in Dorsetshire. It belongs to Hugo's cousins, and you can get it for a song."

The reason she gave for its being obtainable on these terms—its remoteness from a station, its lack of electric light, hot-water pipes, and other vulgar necessities—were exactly those pleading in its favour with two romantic Americans perversely in search of the economic drawbacks which were associated, in their tradition, with unusual architectural felicities.

"I should never believe I was living in an old house unless I was thoroughly uncomfortable," Ned Boyne, the more extravagant of the two, had jocosely insisted; "the least hint of 'convenience' would make me think it had been bought out of an exhibition, with the

pieces numbered, and set up again.” And they had proceeded to enumerate, with humorous precision, their various doubts and demands, refusing to believe that the house their cousin recommended was *really* Tudor till they learned it had no heating system, or that the village church was literally in the grounds till she assured them of the deplorable uncertainty of the water-supply.

“It’s too uncomfortable to be true!” Edward Boyne had continued to exult as the avowal of each disadvantage was successively wrung from her; but he had cut short his rhapsody to ask, with a relapse to distrust: “And the ghost? You’ve been concealing from us the fact that there is no ghost!”

Mary, at the moment, had laughed with him, yet almost with her laugh, being possessed of several sets of independent perceptions, had been struck by a note of flatness in Alida’s answering hilarity.

“Oh, Dorsetshire’s full of ghosts, you know.”

“Yes, yes; but that won’t do. I don’t want to have to drive ten miles to see somebody else’s ghost. I want one of my own on the premises. *Is there a ghost at Lyng?*”

His rejoinder had made Alida laugh again, and it was then that she had flung back tantalisingly: “Oh, there *is* one, of course, but you’ll never know it.”

“Never know it?” Boyne pulled her up. “But what in the world constitutes a ghost except the fact of its being known for one?”

“I can’t say. But that’s the story.”

“That there’s a ghost, but that nobody knows it’s a ghost?” “Well—not till afterward, at any rate.”

“Till afterward?”

“Not till long long afterward.”

“But if it’s once been identified as an unearthly visitant, why hasn’t its *signalement* been handed down in the family? How has it managed to preserve its incognito?”

Alida could only shake her head. “Don’t ask me. But it has.”

“And then suddenly—” Mary spoke up as if from cavernous depths

of divination— “suddenly, long afterward, one says to one’s self ‘*That was it?* ’ ”

She was startled at the sepulchral sound with which her question fell on the banter of the other two, and she saw the shadow of the same surprise flit across Alida’s pupils. “I suppose so. One just has to wait.”

“Oh, hang waiting!” Ned broke in. “Life’s too short for a ghost who can only be enjoyed in retrospect. Can’t we do better than that, Mary?”

But it turned out that in the event they were not destined to, for within three months of their conversation with Mrs. Stair they were settled at Lyng, and the life they had yearned for, to the point of planning it in advance in all its daily details, had actually begun for them.

It was to sit, in the thick December dusk, by just such a wide-hooded fireplace, under just such black oak rafters, with the sense that beyond the mullioned panes the downs were darkened to a deeper solitude: it was for the ultimate indulgence of such sensations that Mary Boyne, abruptly exiled from New York by her husband’s business, had endured for nearly fourteen years the soul-deadening ugliness of a Middle Western town, and that Boyne had ground on doggedly at his engineering till, with a suddenness that still made her blink, the prodigious windfall of the Blue Star Mine had put them at a stroke in possession of life and the leisure to taste it. They had never for a moment meant their new state to be one of idleness; but they meant to give themselves only to harmonious activities. She had her vision of painting and gardening (against a background of grey walls), he dreamed of the production of his long-planned book on the “Economic Basis of Culture”; and with such absorbing work ahead no existence could be too sequestered: they could not get far enough from the world, or plunge deep enough into the past.

Dorsetshire had attracted them from the first by an air of remoteness out of all proportion to its geographical position. But to

the Boynes it was one of the ever-recurring wonders of the whole incredibly compressed island—a nest of counties, as they put it—that for the production of its effects so little of a given quality went so far: that so few miles made a distance, and so short a distance a difference.

“It’s that,” Ned had once enthusiastically explained, “that gives such depth to their effects, such relief to their contrasts. They’ve been able to lay the butter so thick on every delicious mouthful.”

The butter had certainly been laid on thick at Lyng: the old house hidden under a shoulder of the downs had almost all the finer marks of commerce with a protracted past. The mere fact that it was neither large nor exceptional made it, to the Boynes, abound the more completely in its special charm—the charm of having been for centuries a deep dim reservoir of life. The life had probably not been of the most vivid order: for long periods, no doubt, it had fallen as noiselessly into the past as the quiet drizzle of autumn fell, hour after hour, into the fish-pond between the yews; but these backwaters of existence sometimes breed, in their sluggish depths, strange acuties of emotion, and Mary Boyne had felt from the first the mysterious stir of intenser memories.

The feeling had never been stronger than on this particular afternoon when, waiting in the library for the lamps to come, she rose from her seat and stood among the shadows of the hearth. Her husband had gone off, after luncheon, for one of his long tramps on the downs. She had noticed of late that he preferred to go alone; and, in the tried security of their personal relations, had been driven to conclude that his book was bothering him, and that he needed the afternoons to turn over in solitude the problems left from the morning’s work. Certainly the book was not going as smoothly as she had thought it would, and there were lines of perplexity between his eyes such as had never been there in his engineering days. He had often, then, looked fagged to the verge of illness, but the native demon of “worry” had never branded his brow. Yet the few pages he

had so far read to her—the introduction, and a summary of the opening chapter—showed a firm hold on his subject, and an increasing confidence in his powers.

The fact threw her into deeper perplexity, since, now that he had done with “business” and its disturbing contingencies, the one other possible source of anxiety was eliminated. Unless it were his health, then? But physically he had gained since they had come to Dorsetshire, grown robust, ruddier and fresher-eyed. It was only within the last week that she had felt in him the undefinable change which made her restless in his absence, and as tongue-tied in his presence as though it were *she* who had a secret to keep from him!

The thought that there *was* a secret somewhere between them struck her with a sudden rap of wonder, and she looked about her down the long room.

“Can it be the house?” she mused.

The room itself might have been full of secrets. They seemed to be piling themselves up, as evening fell, like the layers and layers of velvet shadow dropping from the low ceiling, the rows of books, the smoke-blurred sculpture of the hearth.

“Why, of course—the house is haunted!” she reflected.

The ghost—Alida’s imperceptible ghost—after figuring largely in the banter of their first month or two at Lyng, had been gradually left aside as too ineffectual for imaginative use. Mary had, indeed, as became the tenant of a haunted house, made the customary inquiries among her rural neighbours, but, beyond a vague “They dü say so, Ma’am,” the villagers had nothing to impart. The elusive spectre had apparently never had sufficient identity for a legend to crystallise about it, and after a time the Boynes had set the matter down to their profit-and-loss account, agreeing that Lyng was one of the few houses good enough in itself to dispense with supernatural enhancements.

“And I suppose, poor ineffectual demon, that’s why it beats its beautiful wings in vain in the void,” Mary had laughingly concluded.

“Or, rather,” Ned answered in the same strain, “why, amid so

much that's ghostly, it can never affirm its separate existence as *the* ghost." And thereupon their invisible housemate had finally dropped out of their references, which were numerous enough to make them soon unaware of the loss.

Now, as she stood on the hearth, the subject of their earlier curiosity revived in her with a new sense of its meaning—a sense gradually acquired through daily contact with the scene of the lurking mystery. It was the house itself, of course, that possessed the ghost-seeing faculty, that communed visually but secretly with its own past; if one could only get into close enough communion with the house, one might surprise its secret, and acquire the ghost-sight on one's own account. Perhaps, in his long hours in this very room, where she never trespassed till the afternoon, her husband *had* acquired it already, and was silently carrying about the weight of whatever it had revealed to him. Mary was too well versed in the code of the spectral world not to know that one could not talk about the ghosts one saw: to do so was almost as great a breach of taste as to name a lady in a club. But this explanation did not really satisfy her. "What, after all, except for the fun of the shudder," she reflected, "would he really care for any of their old ghosts?" And thence she was thrown back once more on the fundamental dilemma: the fact that one's greater or less susceptibility to spectral influences had no particular bearing on the case, since, when one *did* see a ghost at Lyng, one did not know it.

"Not till long afterward," Alida Stair had said. Well, supposing Ned *had* seen one when they first came, and had known only within the last week what had happened to him? More and more under the spell of the hour, she threw back her thoughts to the early days of their tenancy, but at first only to recall a lively confusion of unpacking, settling, arranging of books, and calling to each other from remote corners of the house as, treasure after treasure, it revealed itself to them. It was in this particular connection that she presently recalled a certain soft afternoon of the previous October, when, passing from

the first rapturous flurry of exploration to a detailed inspection of the old house, she had pressed (like a novel heroine) a panel that opened on a flight of corkscrew stairs leading to a flat ledge of the roof—the roof which, from below, seemed to slope away on all sides too abruptly for any but practised feet to scale.

The view from this hidden coign was enchanting, and she had flown down to snatch Ned from his papers and give him the freedom of her discovery. She remembered still how, standing at her side, he had passed his arm about her while their gaze flew to the long tossed horizon-line of the downs, and then dropped contentedly back to trace the arabesque of yew hedges about the fish-pond, and the shadow of the cedar on the lawn.

“And now the other way,” he had said, turning her about within his arm; and closely pressed to him, she had absorbed, like some long satisfying draught, the picture of the grey-walled court, the squat lions on the gates, and the lime-avenue reaching up to the highroad under the downs.

It was just then, while they gazed and held each other, that she had felt his arm relax, and heard a sharp “Hullo!” that made her turn to glance at him.

Distinctly, yes, she now recalled that she had seen, as she glanced, a shadow of anxiety, of perplexity, rather, fall across his face; and, following his eyes, had beheld the figure of a man—a man in loose greyish clothes, as it appeared to her—who was sauntering down the lime-avenue to the court with the doubtful gait of a stranger who seeks his way. Her shortsighted eyes had given her but a blurred impression of slightness and greyishness, with something foreign, or at least unlocal, in the cut of the figure or its dress; but her husband had apparently seen more—seen enough to make him push past her with a hasty “Wait!” and dash down the stairs without pausing to give her a hand.

A slight tendency to dizziness obliged her, after a provisional clutch at the chimney against which they had been leaning, to follow

him first more cautiously; and when she had reached the landing she paused again, for a less definite reason, leaning over the banister to strain her eyes through the silence of the brown sun-flecked depths. She lingered there till, somewhere in those depths, she heard the closing of a door; then, mechanically impelled, she went down the shallow flights of steps till she reached the lower hall.

The front door stood open on the sunlight of the court, and hall and court were empty. The library door was open, too, and after listening in vain for any sound of voices within, she crossed the threshold, and found her husband alone, vaguely fingering the papers on his desk.

He looked up, as if surprised at her entrance, but the shadow of anxiety had passed from his face, leaving it even, as she fancied, a little brighter and clearer than usual.

“What was it? Who was it?” she asked.

“Who?” he repeated, with the surprise still all on his side. “The man we saw coming toward the house.”

He seemed to reflect. “The man? Why, I thought I saw Peters; I dashed after him to say a word about the stable drains, but he had disappeared before I could get down.”

“Disappeared? But he seemed to be walking so slowly when we saw him.”

Boyne shrugged his shoulders. “So I thought; but he must have got up steam in the interval. What do you say to our trying a scramble up Meldon Steep before sunset?”

That was all. At the time the occurrence had been less than nothing, had, indeed, been immediately obliterated by the magic of their first vision from Meldon Steep, a height which they had dreamed of climbing ever since they had first seen its bare spine rising above the roof of Lyng. Doubtless it was the mere fact of the other incident's having occurred on the very day of their ascent to Meldon that had kept it stored away in the fold of memory from which it now emerged; for in itself it had no mark of the portentous.

At the moment there could have been nothing more natural than that Ned should dash himself from the roof in the pursuit of dilatory tradesmen. It was the period when they were always on the watch for one or the other of the specialists employed about the place; always lying in wait for them, and rushing out at them with questions, reproaches or reminders. And certainly in the distance the grey figure had looked like Peters.

Yet now, as she reviewed the scene, she felt her husband's explanation of it to have been invalidated by the look of anxiety on his face. Why had the familiar appearance of Peters made him anxious? Why, above all, if it was of such prime necessity to confer with him on the subject of the stable drains, had the failure to find him produced such a look of relief? Mary could not say that any one of these questions had occurred to her at the time, yet, from the promptness with which they now marshalled themselves at her summons, she had a sense that they must all along have been there, waiting their hour.

II

Weary with her thoughts, she moved to the window. The library was now quite dark, and she was surprised to see how much faint light the outer world still held.

As she peered out into it across the court, a figure shaped itself far down the perspective of bare limes: it looked a mere blot of deeper grey in the greyness, and for an instant, as it moved toward her, her heart thumped to the thought "It's the ghost!"

She had time, in that long instant, to feel suddenly that the man of whom, two months earlier, she had had a distant vision from the roof, was now, at his predestined hour, about to reveal himself as *not* having been Peters; and her spirit sank under the impending fear of the disclosure. But almost with the next tick of the clock the figure, gaining substance and character, showed itself even to her weak sight as her husband's; and she turned to meet him, as he entered,

with the confession of her folly.

"It's really too absurd," she laughed out, "but I never *can* remember!"

"Remember what?" Boyne questioned as they drew together.

"That when one sees the Lyng ghost one never knows it."

Her hand was on his sleeve, and he kept it there, but with no response in his gesture or in the lines of his preoccupied face.

"Did you think you'd seen it?" he asked, after an appreciable interval.

"Why, I actually took *you* for it, my dear, in my mad determination to spot it!"

"Me—just now?" His arm dropped away, and he turned from her with a faint echo of her laugh. "Really, dearest, you'd better give it up, if that's the best you can do."

"Oh, yes, I give it up. Have *you*?" she asked, turning round on him abruptly.

The parlour-maid had entered with letters and a lamp, and the light struck up into Boyne's face as he bent above the tray she presented.

"Have *you*?" Mary perversely insisted, when the servant had disappeared on her errand of illumination.

"Have I what?" he rejoined absently, the light bringing out the sharp stamp of worry between his brows as he turned over the letters.

"Given up trying to see the ghost." Her heart beat a little at the experiment she was making.

Her husband, laying his letters aside, moved away into the shadow of the hearth.

"I never tried," he said, tearing open the wrapper of a newspaper.

"Well, of course," Mary persisted, "the exasperating thing is that there's no use trying, since one can't be sure till so long afterward."

He was unfolding the paper as if he had hardly heard her; but after a pause, during which the sheets rustled spasmodically between his

hands, he looked up to ask, "Have you any idea *how long*?"

Mary had sunk into a low chair beside the fireplace. From her seat she glanced over, startled, at her husband's profile, which was projected against the circle of lamplight.

"No; none. Have *you*?" she retorted, repeating her former phrase with an added stress of intention.

Boyne crumpled the paper into a bunch, and then, inconsequently, turned back with it toward the lamp.

"Lord, no! I only meant," he explained, with a faint tinge of impatience, "is there any legend, any tradition, as to that?"

"Not that I know of," she answered; but the impulse to add "What makes you ask?" was checked by the reappearance of the parlour-maid, with tea and a second lamp.

With the dispersal of shadows, and the repetition of the daily domestic office, Mary Boyne felt herself less oppressed by that sense of something mutely imminent which had darkened her afternoon. For a few moments she gave herself to the details of her task, and when she looked up from it she was struck to the point of bewilderment by the change in her husband's face. He had seated himself near the farther lamp, and was absorbed in the perusal of his letters; but was it something he had found in them, or merely the shifting of her own point of view, that had restored his features to their normal aspect? The longer she looked the more definitely the change affirmed itself. The lines of tension had vanished, and such traces of fatigue as lingered were of the kind easily attributable to steady mental effort. He glanced up, as if drawn by her gaze, and met her eyes with a smile.

"I'm dying for my tea, you know; and here's a letter for you," he said.

She took the letter he held out in exchange for the cup she proffered him, and, returning to her seat, broke the seal with the languid gesture of the reader whose interests are all enclosed in the circle of one cherished presence.

Her next conscious motion was that of starting to her feet, the letter falling to them as she rose, while she held out to her husband a newspaper clipping.

“Ned! What’s this? What does it mean?”

He had risen at the same instant, almost as if hearing her cry before she uttered it; and for a perceptible space of time he and she studied each other, like adversaries watching for an advantage, across the space between her chair and his desk.

“What’s what? You fairly made me jump!” Boyne said at length, moving toward her with a sudden half-exasperated laugh. The shadow of apprehension was on his face again, not now a look of fixed foreboding, but a shifting vigilance of lips and eyes that gave her the sense of his feeling himself invisibly surrounded.

Her hand shook so that she could hardly give him the clipping.

“This article—from the *Waukesha Sentinel*—that a man named Elwell has brought suit against you—that there was something wrong about the Blue Star Mine. I can’t understand more than half.”

They continued to face each other as she spoke, and to her astonishment she saw that her words had the almost immediate effect of dissipating the strained watchfulness of his look.

“Oh, *that!*” He glanced down the printed slip, and then folded it with the gesture of one who handles something harmless and familiar. “What’s the matter with you this afternoon, Mary? I thought you’d got bad news.”

She stood before him with her undefinable terror subsiding slowly under the reassurance of his tone.

“You knew about this, then—it’s all right?”

“Certainly I knew about it; and it’s all right.”

“But what *is* it? I don’t understand. What does this man accuse you of?”

“Pretty nearly every crime in the calendar.” Boyne had tossed the clipping down, and thrown himself into an armchair near the fire. “Do you want to hear the story? It’s not particularly interesting—just

a squabble over interests in the Blue Star.”

“But who is this Elwell? I don’t know the name.”

“Oh, he’s a fellow I put into it—gave him a hand up. I told you all about him at the time.”

“I daresay. I must have forgotten.” Vainly she strained back among her memories. “But if you helped him, why does he make this return?”

“Probably some shyster lawyer got hold of him and talked him over. It’s all rather technical and complicated. I thought that kind of thing bored you.”

His wife felt a sting of compunction. Theoretically, she deprecated the American wife’s detachment from her husband’s professional interests, but in practice she had always found it difficult to fix her attention on Boyne’s report of the transactions in which his varied interests involved him. Besides, she had felt during their years of exile, that, in a community where the amenities of living could be obtained only at the cost of efforts as arduous as her husband’s professional labours, such brief leisure as he and she could command should be used as an escape from immediate preoccupations, a flight to the life they always dreamed of living. Once or twice, now that this new life had actually drawn its magic circle about them, she had asked herself if she had done right; but hitherto such conjectures had been no more than the retrospective excursions of an active fancy. Now, for the first time, it startled her a little to find how little she knew of the material foundation on which her happiness was built.

She glanced at her husband, and was again reassured by the composure of his face; yet she felt the need of more definite grounds for her reassurance.

“But doesn’t this suit worry you? Why have you never spoken to me about it?”

He answered both questions at once. “I didn’t speak of it at first because it *did* worry me—annoyed me, rather. But it’s all ancient history now. Your correspondent must have got hold of a back

number of the *Sentinel*."

She felt a quick thrill of relief. "You mean it's over? He's lost his case?"

There was a just perceptible delay in Boyne's reply. "The suit's been withdrawn—that's all."

But she persisted, as if to exonerate herself from the inward charge of being too easily put off. "Withdrawn it because he saw he had no chance?"

"Oh, he had no chance," Boyne answered.

She was still struggling with a dimly felt perplexity at the back of her thoughts.

"How long ago was it withdrawn?"

He paused, as if with a slight return of his former uncertainty. "I've just had the news now; but I've been expecting it."

"Just now—in one of your letters?"

"Yes; in one of my letters."

She made no answer, and was aware only, after a short interval of waiting, that he had risen, and, strolling across the room, had placed himself on the sofa at her side. She felt him, as he did so, pass an arm about her, she felt his hand seek hers and clasp it, and turning slowly, drawn by the warmth of his cheek, she met his smiling eyes.

"It's all right—it's all right?" she questioned, through the flood of her dissolving doubts; and "I give you my word it was never righter!" he laughed back at her, holding her close.

III

One of the strangest things she was afterward to recall out of all the next day's strangeness was the sudden and complete recovery of her sense of security.

It was in the air when she woke in her low-ceiled, dusky room; it went with her down-stairs to the breakfast-table, flashed out at her from the fire, and reduplicated itself from the flanks of the urn and the sturdy flutings of the Georgian teapot. It was as if, in some

roundabout way, all her diffused fears of the previous day, with their moment of sharp concentration about the newspaper article—as if this dim questioning of the future, and startled return upon the past, had between them liquidated the arrears of some haunting moral obligation. If she had indeed been careless of her husband's affairs, it was, her new state seemed to prove, because her faith in him instinctively justified such carelessness; and his right to her faith had now affirmed itself in the very face of menace and suspicion. She had never seen him more untroubled, more naturally and unconsciously himself, than after the cross-examination to which she had subjected him: it was almost as if he had been aware of her doubts, and had wanted the air cleared as much as she did.

It was as clear, thank Heaven! as the bright outer light that surprised her almost with a touch of summer when she issued from the house for her daily round of the gardens. She had left Boyne at his desk, indulging herself, as she passed the library door, by a last peep at his quiet face, where he bent, pipe in mouth, above his papers; and now she had her own morning's task to perform. The task involved, on such charmed winter days, almost as much happy loitering about the different quarters of her demesne as if spring were already at work there. There were such endless possibilities still before her, such opportunities to bring out the latent graces of the old place, without a single irreverent touch of alteration, that the winter was all too short to plan what spring and autumn executed. And her recovered sense of safety gave, on this particular morning, a peculiar zest to her progress through the sweet still place. She went first to the kitchen-garden, where the espaliered pear-trees drew complicated patterns on the walls, and pigeons were fluttering and preening about the silvery-slatted roof of their cot. There was something wrong about the piping of the hothouse, and she was expecting an authority from Dorchester, who was to drive out between trains and make a diagnosis of the boiler. But when she dipped into the damp heat of the greenhouses, among the spiced

scents and waxy pinks and reds of old-fashioned exotics—even the flora of Lyng was in the note!—she learned that the great man had not arrived, and, the day being too rare to waste in an artificial atmosphere, she came out again and paced along the springy turf of the bowling-green to the gardens behind the house. At their farther end rose a grass terrace, looking across the fishpond and yew hedges to the long house-front with its twisted chimney-stacks and blue roof angles all drenched in the pale gold moisture of the air.

Seen thus, across the level tracery of the gardens, it sent her, from open windows and hospitably smoking chimneys, the look of some warm human presence, of a mind slowly ripened on a sunny wall of experience. She had never before had such a sense of her intimacy with it, such a conviction that its secrets were all beneficent, kept, as they said to children, “for one’s good,” such a trust in its power to gather up her life and Ned’s into the harmonious pattern of the long long story it sat there weaving in the sun.

She heard steps behind her, and turned, expecting to see the gardener accompanied by the engineer from Dorchester. But only one figure was in sight, that of a youngish slightly built man, who, for reasons she could not on the spot have given, did not remotely resemble her notion of an authority on hot-house boilers. The new-comer, on seeing her, lifted his hat, and paused with the air of a gentleman—perhaps a traveller—who wishes to make it known that his intrusion is involuntary. Lyng occasionally attracted the more cultivated traveller, and Mary half-expected to see the stranger dissemble a camera, or justify his presence by producing it. But he made no gesture of any sort, and after a moment she asked, in a tone responding to the courteous hesitation of his attitude: “Is there any one you wish to see?”

“I came to see Mr. Boyne,” he answered. His intonation, rather than his accent, was faintly American, and Mary, at the note, looked at him more closely. The brim of his soft felt hat cast a shade on his face, which, thus obscured, wore to her short-sighted gaze a look of

seriousness, as of a person arriving "on business," and civilly but firmly aware of his rights.

Past experience had made her equally sensible to such claims; but she was jealous of her husband's morning hours, and doubtful of his having given any one the right to intrude on them.

"Have you an appointment with my husband?" she asked.

The visitor hesitated, as if unprepared for the question.

"I think he expects me," he replied.

It was Mary's turn to hesitate. "You see this is his time for work: he never sees any one in the morning."

He looked at her a moment without answering; then, as if accepting her decision, he began to move away. As he turned, Mary saw him pause and glance up at the peaceful house-front. Something in his air suggested weariness and disappointment, the dejection of the traveller who has come from far off and whose hours are limited by the time-table. It occurred to her that if this were the case her refusal might have made his errand vain, and a sense of compunction caused her to hasten after him.

"May I ask if you have come a long way?"

He gave her the same grave look. "Yes—I have come a long way."

"Then, if you'll go to the house, no doubt my husband will see you now. You'll find him in the library."

She did not know why she had added the last phrase, except from a vague impulse to atone for her previous inhospitality. The visitor seemed about to express his thanks, but her attention was distracted by the approach of the gardener with a companion who bore all the marks of being the expert from Dorchester.

"This way," she said, waving the stranger to the house; and an instant later she had forgotten him in the absorption of her meeting with the boiler-maker.

The encounter led to such far-reaching results that the engineer ended by finding it expedient to ignore his train, and Mary was beguiled into spending the remainder of the morning in absorbed

confabulation among the flower-pots. When the colloquy ended, she was surprised to find that it was nearly luncheon-time, and she half expected, as she hurried back to the house, to see her husband coming out to meet her. But she found no one in the court but an under-gardener raking the gravel, and the hall, when she entered it, was so silent that she guessed Boyne to be still at work.

Not wishing to disturb him, she turned into the drawing-room, and there, at her writing-table, lost herself in renewed calculations of the outlay to which the morning's conference had pledged her. The fact that she could permit herself such follies had not yet lost its novelty; and somehow, in contrast to the vague fears of the previous days, it now seemed an element of her recovered security, of the sense that, as Ned had said, things in general had never been "righter."

She was still luxuriating in a lavish play of figures when the parlour-maid, from the threshold, roused her with an enquiry as to the expediency of serving luncheon. It was one of their jokes that Trimmle announced luncheon as if she were divulging a state secret and Mary, intent upon her papers, merely murmured an absent-minded assent.

She felt Trimmle wavering doubtfully on the threshold, as if in rebuke of such unconsidered assent; then her retreating steps sounded down the passage, and Mary, pushing away her papers, crossed the hall and went to the library door. It was still closed, and she wavered in her turn, disliking to disturb her husband, yet anxious that he should not exceed his usual measure of work. As she stood there, balancing her impulses, Trimmle returned with the announcement of luncheon, and Mary, thus impelled, opened the library door.

Boyne was not at his desk, and she peered about her, expecting to discover him before the book-shelves, somewhere down the length of the room; but her call brought no response, and gradually it became clear to her that he was not there.

She turned back to the parlour-maid.

“Mr. Boyne must be up-stairs. Please tell him that luncheon is ready.”

Trimmle appeared to hesitate between the obvious duty of obedience and an equally obvious conviction of the foolishness of the injunction laid on her. The struggle resulted in her saying: “If you please, Madam, Mr. Boyne’s not up-stairs.”

“Not in his room? Are you sure?”

“I’m sure, Madam.”

Mary consulted the clock. “Where is he, then?”

“He’s gone out,” Trimmle announced, with the superior air of one who has respectfully waited for the question that a well-ordered mind would have put first.

Mary’s conjecture had been right, then. Boyne must have gone to the gardens to meet her, and since she had missed him, it was clear that he had taken the shorter way by the south door, instead of going round to the court. She crossed the hall to the French window opening directly on the yew garden, but the parlour-maid, after another moment of inner conflict, decided to bring out: “Please, Madam, Mr. Boyne didn’t go that way.”

Mary turned back. “Where *did* he go? And when?”

“He went out of the front door, up the drive, Madam.” It was a matter of principle with Trimmle never to answer more than one question at a time.

“Up the drive? At this hour?” Mary went to the door herself, and glanced across the court through the tunnel of bare limes. But its perspective was as empty as when she had scanned it on entering.

“Did Mr. Boyne leave no message?”

Trimmle seemed to surrender herself to a last struggle with the forces of chaos.

“No, Madam. He just went out with the gentleman.”

“The gentleman? What gentleman?” Mary wheeled about, as if to front this new factor.

“The gentleman who called, Madam,” said Trimmle resignedly.

“When did a gentleman call? Do explain yourself, Trimmle!”

Only the fact that Mary was very hungry, and that she wanted to consult her husband about the greenhouses, would have caused her to lay so unusual an injunction on her attendant; and even now she was detached enough to note in Trimmle’s eye the dawning defiance of the respectful subordinate who has been pressed too hard.

“I couldn’t exactly say the hour, Madam, because I didn’t let the gentleman in,” she replied, with an air of discreetly ignoring the irregularity of her mistress’s course.

“You didn’t let him in?”

“No, Madam. When the bell rang I was dressing, and Agnes——”

“Go and ask Agnes, then,” said Mary.

Trimmle still wore her look of patient magnanimity. “Agnes would not know, Madam, for she had unfortunately burnt her hand in trimming the wick of the new lamp from town”—Trimmle, as Mary was aware, had always been opposed to the new lamp— “and so Mrs. Dockett sent the kitchen-maid instead.”

Mary looked again at the clock. “It’s after two! Go and ask the kitchen-maid if Mr. Boyne left any word.”

She went into luncheon without waiting, and Trimmle presently brought her there the kitchen-maid’s statement that the gentleman had called about eleven o’clock, and that Mr. Boyne had gone out with him without leaving any message. The kitchen-maid did not even know the caller’s name, for he had written it on a slip of paper, which he had folded and handed to her, with the injunction to deliver it at once to Mr. Boyne.

Mary finished her luncheon, still wondering, and when it was over, and Trimmle had brought the coffee to the drawing-room, her wonder had deepened to a first faint tinge of disquietude. It was unlike Boyne to absent himself without explanation at so unwonted an hour, and the difficulty of identifying the visitor whose summons he had apparently obeyed made his disappearance the more unaccountable. Mary Boyne’s experience as the wife of a busy

engineer, subject to sudden calls and compelled to keep irregular hours, had trained her to the philosophic acceptance of surprises; but since Boyne's withdrawal from business he had adopted a Benedictine regularity of life. As if to make up for the dispersed and agitated years, with their "stand-up" lunches, and dinners rattled down to the joltings of the dining-cars, he cultivated the last refinements of punctuality and monotony, discouraging his wife's fancy for the unexpected, and declaring that to a delicate taste there were infinite gradations of pleasure in the recurrences of habit.

Still, since no life can completely defend itself from the unforeseen, it was evident that all Boyne's precautions would sooner or later prove unavailable, and Mary concluded that he had cut short a tiresome visit by walking with his caller to the station, or at least accompanying him for part of the way.

This conclusion relieved her from farther preoccupation, and she went out herself to take up her conference with the gardener. Thence she walked to the village post-office, a mile or so away; and when she turned toward home the early twilight was setting in.

She had taken a foot-path across the downs, and as Boyne, meanwhile, had probably returned from the station by the highroad, there was little likelihood of their meeting. She felt sure, however, of his having reached the house before her; so sure that, when she entered it herself, without even pausing to inquire of Trimmle, she made directly for the library. But the library was still empty, and with an unwonted exactness of visual memory she observed that the papers on her husband's desk lay precisely as they had lain when she had gone in to call him to luncheon.

Then of a sudden she was seized by a vague dread of the unknown. She had closed the door behind her on entering, and as she stood alone in the long silent room, her dread seemed to take shape and sound, to be there breathing and lurking among the shadows. Her short-sighted eyes strained through them, half-discerning an actual presence, something aloof, that watched and knew; and in the recoil

from that intangible presence she threw herself on the bell-rope and gave it a sharp pull.

The sharp summons brought Trimmle in precipitately with a lamp, and Mary breathed again at this sobering reappearance of the usual.

"You may bring tea if Mr. Boyne is in," she said, to justify her ring.

"Very well, Madam. But Mr. Boyne is not in," said Trimmle, putting down the lamp.

"Not in? You mean he's come back and gone out again?"

"No, Madam. He's never been back."

The dread stirred again, and Mary knew that now it had her fast.

"Not since he went out with—the gentleman?"

"Not since he went out with the gentleman."

"But who *was* the gentleman?" Mary insisted, with the shrill note of some one trying to be heard through a confusion of noises.

"That I couldn't say, Madam." Trimmle, standing there by the lamp, seemed suddenly to grow less round and rosy, as though eclipsed by the same creeping shade of apprehension.

"But the kitchen-maid knows—wasn't it the kitchen-maid who let him in?"

"She doesn't know either, Madam, for he wrote his name on a folded paper."

Mary, through her agitation, was aware that they were both designating the unknown visitor by a vague pronoun, instead of the conventional formula which, till then, had kept their allusions within the bounds of conformity. And at the same moment her mind caught at the suggestion of the folded paper.

"But he must have a name! Where's the paper?"

She moved to the desk, and began to turn over the documents that littered it. The first that caught her eye was an unfinished letter in her husband's hand, with his pen lying across it, as though dropped there at a sudden summons.

"My dear Parvis"—who was Parvis?—"I have just received your letter announcing Elwell's death, and while I suppose there is now no

farther risk of trouble, it might be safer——”

She tossed the sheet aside, and continued her search; but no folded paper was discoverable among the letters and pages of manuscript which had been swept together in a heap, as if by a hurried or a startled gesture.

“But the kitchen-maid *saw* him. Send her here,” she commanded, wondering at her dulness in not thinking sooner of so simple a solution.

Trimmle vanished in a flash, as if thankful to be out of the room, and when she reappeared, conducting the agitated underling, Mary had regained her self-possession, and had her questions ready.

The gentleman was a stranger, yes—that she understood. But what had he said? And, above all, what had he looked like? The first question was easily enough answered, for the disconcerting reason that he had said so little—had merely asked for Mr. Boyne, and, scribbling something on a bit of paper, had requested that it should at once be carried in to him.

“Then you don’t know what he wrote? You’re not sure it *was* his name?”

The kitchen-maid was not sure, but supposed it was, since he had written it in answer to her inquiry as to whom she should announce.

“And when you carried the paper in to Mr. Boyne, what did he say?”

The kitchen-maid did not think that Mr. Boyne had said anything, but she could not be sure, for just as she had handed him the paper and he was opening it, she had become aware that the visitor had followed her into the library, and she had slipped out, leaving the two gentlemen together.

“But then, if you left them in the library, how do you know that they went out of the house?”

This question plunged the witness into a momentary inarticulateness, from which she was rescued by Trimmle, who, by means of ingenious circumlocutions, elicited the statement that

before she could cross the hall to the back passage she had heard the two gentlemen behind her, and had seen them go out of the front door together.

“Then, if you saw the strange gentleman twice, you must be able to tell me what he looked like.”

But with this final challenge to her powers of expression it became clear that the limit of the kitchen-maid’s endurance had been reached. The obligation of going to the front door to “show in” a visitor was in itself so subversive of the fundamental order of things that it had thrown her faculties into hopeless disarray, and she could only stammer out, after various panting efforts: “His hat, mum, was different-like, as you might say——”

“Different? How different?” Mary flashed out, her own mind, in the same instant, leaping back to an image left on it that morning, and then lost under layers of subsequent impressions.

“His hat had a wide brim, you mean? and his face was pale—a youngish face?” Mary pressed her, with a white-lipped intensity of interrogation. But if the kitchen-maid found any adequate answer to this challenge, it was swept away for her listener down the rushing current of her own convictions. The stranger—the stranger in the garden! Why had Mary not thought of him before? She needed no one now to tell her that it was he who had called for her husband and gone away with him. But who was he, and why had Boyne obeyed him?

IV

It leaped out at her suddenly, like a grin out of the dark, that they had often called England so little—“such a confoundedly hard place to get lost in.”

A confoundedly hard place to get lost in! That had been her husband’s phrase. And now, with the whole machinery of official investigation sweeping its flash-lights from shore to shore, and across the dividing straits; now, with Boyne’s name blazing from the walls

of every town and village, his portrait (how that wrung her!) hawked up and down the country like the image of a hunted criminal; now the little compact populous island, so policed, surveyed and administered, revealed itself as a Sphinx-like guardian of abysmal mysteries, staring back into his wife's anguished eyes as if with the wicked joy of knowing something they would never know!

In the fortnight since Boyne's disappearance there had been no word of him, no trace of his movements. Even the usual misleading reports that raise expectancy in tortured bosoms had been few and fleeting. No one but the kitchen-maid had seen Boyne leave the house, and no one else had seen "the gentleman" who accompanied him. All enquiries in the neighbourhood failed to elicit the memory of a stranger's presence that day in the neighbourhood of Lyng. And no one had met Edward Boyne, either alone or in company, in any of the neighbouring villages, or on the road across the downs, or at either of the local railway-stations. The sunny English noon had swallowed him as completely as if he had gone out into Cimmerian night.

Mary, while every official means of investigation was working at its highest pressure, had ransacked her husband's papers for any trace of antecedent complications, of entanglements or obligations unknown to her, that might throw a ray into the darkness. But if any such had existed in the background of Boyne's life, they had vanished like the slip of paper on which the visitor had written his name. There remained no possible thread of guidance except—if it were indeed an exception—the letter which Boyne had apparently been in the act of writing when he received his mysterious summons. That letter, read and reread by his wife, and submitted by her to the police, yielded little enough to feed conjecture.

"I have just heard of Elwell's death, and while I suppose there is now no farther risk of trouble, it might be safer——" That was all. The "risk of trouble" was easily explained by the newspaper clipping which had apprised Mary of the suit brought against her husband by

one of his associates in the Blue Star enterprise. The only new information conveyed by the letter was the fact of its showing Boyne, when he wrote it, to be still apprehensive of the results of the suit, though he had told his wife that it had been withdrawn, and though the letter itself proved that the plaintiff was dead. It took several days of cabling to fix the identity of the "Parvis" to whom the fragment was addressed, but even after these enquiries had shown him to be a Waukesha lawyer, no new facts concerning the Elwell suit were elicited. He appeared to have had no direct concern in it, but to have been conversant with the facts merely as an acquaintance, and possible intermediary; and he declared himself unable to guess with what object Boyne intended to seek his assistance.

This negative information, sole fruit of the first fortnight's search, was not increased by a jot during the slow weeks that followed. Mary knew that the investigations were still being carried on, but she had a vague sense of their gradually slackening, as the actual march of time seemed to slacken. It was as though the days, flying horror-struck from the shrouded image of the one inscrutable day, gained assurance as the distance lengthened, till at last they fell back into their normal gait. And so with the human imaginations at work on the dark event. No doubt it occupied them still, but week by week and hour by hour it grew less absorbing, took up less space, was slowly but inevitably crowded out of the foreground of consciousness by the new problems perpetually bubbling up from the cloudy caldron of human experience.

Even Mary Boyne's consciousness gradually felt the same lowering of velocity. It still swayed with the incessant oscillations of conjecture; but they were slower, more rhythmical in their beat. There were even moments of weariness when, like the victim of some poison which leaves the brain clear, but holds the body motionless, she saw herself domesticated with the Horror, accepting its perpetual presence as one of the fixed conditions of life.

These moments lengthened into hours and days, till she passed into a phase of stolid acquiescence. She watched the routine of daily life with the incurious eye of a savage on whom the meaningless processes of civilisation make but the faintest impression. She had come to regard herself as part of the routine, a spoke of the wheel, revolving with its motion; she felt almost like the furniture of the room in which she sat, an insensate object to be dusted and pushed about with the chairs and tables. And this deepening apathy held her fast at Lyng, in spite of the entreaties of friends and the usual medical recommendation of "change." Her friends supposed that her refusal to move was inspired by the belief that her husband would one day return to the spot from which he had vanished, and a beautiful legend grew up about this imaginary state of waiting. But in reality she had no such belief: the depths of anguish enclosing her were no longer lighted by flashes of hope. She was sure that Boyne would never come back, that he had gone out of her sight as completely as if Death itself had waited that day on the threshold. She had even renounced, one by one, the various theories as to his disappearance which had been advanced by the press, the police, and her own agonised imagination. In sheer lassitude her mind turned from these alternatives of horror, and sank back into the blank fact that he was gone.

No, she would never know what had become of him—no one would ever know. But the house *knew*; the library in which she spent her long lonely evenings knew. For it was here that the last scene had been enacted, here that the stranger had come, and spoken the word which had caused Boyne to rise and follow him. The floor she trod had felt his tread; the books on the shelves had seen his face; and there were moments when the intense consciousness of the old dusky walls seemed about to break out into some audible revelation of their secret. But the revelation never came, and she knew it would never come. Lyng was not one of the garrulous old houses that betray the secrets entrusted to them. Its very legend proved that it

had always been the mute accomplice, the incorruptible custodian, of the mysteries it had surprised. And Mary Boyne, sitting face to face with its silence, felt the futility of seeking to break it by any human means.

V

"I don't say it *wasn't* straight, and yet I don't say it *was* straight. It was business."

Mary, at the words, lifted her head with a start, and looked intently at the speaker.

When, half an hour before, a card with "Mr. Parvis" on it had been brought up to her, she had been immediately aware that the name had been a part of her consciousness ever since she had read it at the head of Boyne's unfinished letter. In the library she had found awaiting her a small sallow man with a bald head and gold eye-glasses, and it sent a tremor through her to know that this was the person to whom her husband's last known thought had been directed.

Parvis, civilly, but without vain preamble—in the manner of a man who has his watch in his hand—had set forth the object of his visit. He had "run over" to England on business, and finding himself in the neighbourhood of Dorchester, had not wished to leave it without paying his respects to Mrs. Boyne; and without asking her, if the occasion offered, what she meant to do about Bob Elwell's family.

The words touched the spring of some obscure dread in Mary's bosom. Did her visitor, after all, know what Boyne had meant by his unfinished phrase? She asked for an elucidation of his question, and noticed at once that he seemed surprised at her continued ignorance of the subject. Was it possible that she really knew as little as she said?

"I know nothing—you must tell me," she faltered out; and her visitor thereupon proceeded to unfold his story. It threw, even to her confused perceptions, and imperfectly initiated vision, a lurid glare

on the whole hazy episode of the Blue Star Mine. Her husband had made his money in that brilliant speculation at the cost of “getting ahead” of some one less alert to seize the chance; and the victim of his ingenuity was young Robert Elwell, who had “put him on” to the Blue Star scheme.

Parvis, at Mary’s first cry, had thrown her a sobering glance through his impartial glasses.

“Bob Elwell wasn’t smart enough, that’s all; if he had been, he might have turned round and served Boyne the same way. It’s the kind of thing that happens every day in business. I guess it’s what the scientists call the survival of the fittest—see?” said Mr. Parvis, evidently pleased with the aptness of his analogy.

Mary felt a physical shrinking from the next question she tried to frame: it was as though the words on her lips had a taste that nauseated her.

“But then—you accuse my husband of doing something dishonourable?”

Mr. Parvis surveyed the question dispassionately. “Oh, no, I don’t. I don’t even say it wasn’t straight.” He glanced up and down the long lines of books, as if one of them might have supplied him with the definition he sought. “I don’t say it *wasn’t* straight, and yet I don’t say it *was* straight. It was business.” After all, no definition in his category could be more comprehensive than that.

Mary sat staring at him with a look of terror. He seemed to her like the indifferent emissary of some evil power.

“But Mr. Elwell’s lawyers apparently did not take your view, since I suppose the suit was withdrawn by their advice.”

“Oh, yes; they knew he hadn’t a leg to stand on, technically. It was when they advised him to withdraw the suit that he got desperate. You see, he’d borrowed most of the money he lost in the Blue Star, and he was up a tree. That’s why he shot himself when they told him he had no show.”

The horror was sweeping over Mary in great deafening waves.

“He shot himself? He killed himself because of *that*?”

“Well, he didn’t kill himself, exactly. He dragged on two months before he died.” Parvis emitted the statement as unemotionally as a gramophone grinding out its “record.”

“You mean that he tried to kill himself, and failed? And tried again?”

“Oh, he didn’t have to *try* again,” said Parvis grimly.

They sat opposite each other in silence, he swinging his eye-glasses thoughtfully about his finger, she, motionless, her arms stretched along her knees in an attitude of rigid tension.

“But if you knew all this,” she began at length, hardly able to force her voice above a whisper, “how is it that when I wrote you at the time of my husband’s disappearance you said you didn’t understand his letter?”

Parvis received this without perceptible embarrassment: “Why, I didn’t understand it—strictly speaking. And it wasn’t the time to talk about it, if I had. The Elwell business was settled when the suit was withdrawn. Nothing I could have told you would have helped you to find your husband.”

Mary continued to scrutinise him. “Then why are you telling me now?”

Still Parvis did not hesitate. “Well, to begin with, I supposed you knew more than you appear to—I mean about the circumstances of Elwell’s death. And then people are talking of it now; the whole matter’s been raked up again. And I thought if you didn’t know you ought to.”

She remained silent, and he continued: “You see, it’s only come out lately what a bad state Elwell’s affairs were in. His wife’s a proud woman, and she fought on as long as she could, going out to work, and taking sewing at home when she got too sick—something with the heart, I believe. But she had his mother to look after, and the children, and she broke down under it, and finally had to ask for help. That called attention to the case, and the papers took it up, and

a subscription was started. Everybody out there liked Bob Elwell, and most of the prominent names in the place are down on the list, and people began to wonder why——”

Parvis broke off to fumble in an inner pocket. “Here,” he continued, “here’s an account of the whole thing from the *Sentinel*—a little sensational, of course. But I guess you’d better look it over.”

He held out a newspaper to Mary, who unfolded it slowly, remembering, as she did so, the evening when, in that same room, the perusal of a clipping from the *Sentinel* had first shaken the depths of her security.

As she opened the paper, her eyes, shrinking from the glaring headlines, “Widow of Boyne’s Victim Forced to Appeal for Aid,” ran down the column of text to two portraits inserted in it. The first was her husband’s, taken from a photograph made the year they had come to England. It was the picture of him that she liked best, the one that stood on the writing-table upstairs in her bedroom. As the eyes in the photograph met hers, she felt it would be impossible to read what was said of him, and closed her lids with the sharpness of the pain.

“I thought if you felt disposed to put your name down——” she heard Parvis continue.

She opened her eyes with an effort, and they fell on the other portrait. It was that of a youngish man, slightly built, with features somewhat blurred by the shadow of a projecting hat-brim. Where had she seen that outline before? She stared at it confusedly, her heart hammering in her ears. Then she gave a cry.

“This is the man—the man who came for my husband!”

She heard Parvis start to his feet, and was dimly aware that she had slipped backward into the corner of the sofa, and that he was bending above her in alarm. She straightened herself, and reached out for the paper, which she had dropped.

“It’s the man! I should know him anywhere!” she persisted in a voice that sounded to her own ears like a scream.

Parvis's answer seemed to come to her from far off, down endless fog-muffled windings.

"Mrs. Boyne, you're not very well. Shall I call somebody? Shall I get a glass of water?"

"No, no, no!" She threw herself toward him, her hand frantically clutching the newspaper. "I tell you, it's the man! I *know* him! He spoke to me in the garden!"

Parvis took the journal from her, directing his glasses to the portrait. "It can't be, Mrs. Boyne. It's Robert Elwell."

"Robert Elwell?" Her white stare seemed to travel into space. "Then it was Robert Elwell who came for him."

"Came for Boyne? The day he went away from here?" Parvis's voice dropped as hers rose. He bent over, laying a fraternal hand on her, as if to coax her gently back into her seat. "Why, Elwell was dead! Don't you remember?"

Mary sat with her eyes fixed on the picture, unconscious of what he was saying.

"Don't you remember Boyne's unfinished letter to me—the one you found on his desk that day? It was written just after he'd heard of Elwell's death." She noticed an odd shake in Parvis's unemotional voice. "Surely you remember!" he urged her.

Yes, she remembered: that was the profoundest horror of it. Elwell had died the day before her husband's disappearance; and this was Elwell's portrait; and it was the portrait of the man who had spoken to her in the garden. She lifted her head and looked slowly about the library. The library could have borne witness that it was also the portrait of the man who had come in that day to call Boyne from his unfinished letter. Through the misty surgings of her brain she heard the faint boom of half-forgotten words—words spoken by Alida Stair on the lawn at Pangbourne before Boyne and his wife had ever seen the house at Lyng, or had imagined that they might one day live there.

"This was the man who spoke to me," she repeated.

She looked again at Parvis. He was trying to conceal his disturbance under what he probably imagined to be an expression of indulgent commiseration; but the edges of his lips were blue. "He thinks me mad; but I'm not mad," she reflected; and suddenly there flashed upon her a way of justifying her strange affirmation.

She sat quiet, controlling the quiver of her lips, and waiting till she could trust her voice; then she said, looking straight at Parvis: "Will you answer me one question, please? When was it that Robert Elwell tried to kill himself?"

"When—when?" Parvis stammered.

"Yes; the date. Please try to remember."

She saw that he was growing still more afraid of her. "I have a reason," she insisted.

"Yes, yes. Only I can't remember. About two months before, I should say."

"I want the date," she repeated.

Parvis picked up the newspaper. "We might see here," he said, still humouring her. He ran his eyes down the page. "Here it is. Last October—the——"

She caught the words from him. "The 20th, wasn't it?" With a sharp look at her, he verified. "Yes, the 20th. Then you *did* know?"

"I know now." Her gaze continued to travel past him. "Sunday, the 20th—that was the day he came first."

Parvis's voice was almost inaudible. "Came *here* first?"

"Yes."

"You saw him twice, then?"

"Yes, twice." She just breathed it at him. "He came first on the 20th of October. I remember the date because it was the day we went up Meldon Steep for the first time." She felt a faint gasp of inward laughter at the thought that but for that she might have forgotten.

Parvis continued to scrutinise her, as if trying to intercept her gaze.

“We saw him from the roof,” she went on. “He came down the lime-avenue toward the house. He was dressed just as he is in that picture. My husband saw him first. He was frightened, and ran down ahead of me; but there was no one there. He had vanished.”

“Elwell had vanished?” Parvis faltered.

“Yes.” Their two whispers seemed to grope for each other. “I couldn’t think what had happened. I see now. He *tried* to come then; but he wasn’t dead enough—he couldn’t reach us. He had to wait for two months to die; and then he came back again—and Ned went with him.”

She nodded at Parvis with the look of triumph of a child who has worked out a difficult puzzle. But suddenly she lifted her hands with a desperate gesture, pressing them to her temples.

“Oh, my God! I sent him to Ned—I told him where to go! I sent him to this room!” she screamed.

She felt the walls of books rush toward her, like inward falling ruins; and she heard Parvis, a long way off, through the ruins, crying to her, and struggling to get at her. But she was numb to his touch, she did not know what he was saying. Through the tumult she heard but one clear note, the voice of Alida Stair, speaking on the lawn at Pangbourne.

“You won’t know till afterward,” it said. “You won’t know till long, long afterward.”

The Letters

UP THE HILL from the station at St.-Cloud, Lizzie West climbed in the cold spring sunshine. As she breasted the incline, she noticed the first waves of wistaria over courtyard railings and the high lights of new foliage against the walls of ivy-matted gardens; and she thought again, as she had thought a hundred times before, that she had never seen so beautiful a spring.

She was on her way to the Deerings' house, in a street near the hilltop; and every step was dear and familiar to her. She went there five times a week to teach little Juliet Deering, the daughter of Mr. Vincent Deering, the distinguished American artist. Juliet had been her pupil for two years, and day after day, during that time, Lizzie West had mounted the hill in all weathers; sometimes with her umbrella bent against the rain, sometimes with her frail cotton parasol unfurled beneath a fiery sun, sometimes with the snow soaking through her boots or a bitter wind piercing her thin jacket, sometimes with the dust whirling about her and bleaching the flowers of the poor little hat that *had* to "carry her through" till next summer.

At first the ascent had seemed tedious enough, as dull as the trudge to her other lessons. Lizzie was not a heaven-sent teacher; she had no born zeal for her calling, and though she dealt kindly and dutifully with her pupils, she did not fly to them on winged feet. But one day something had happened to change the face of life, and since then the climb to the Deering house had seemed like a dream-flight up a heavenly stairway.

Her heart beat faster as she remembered it—no longer in a tumult of fright and self-reproach, but softly, happily, as if brooding over a possession that none could take from her.

It was on a day of the previous October that she had stopped, after Juliet's lesson, to ask if she might speak to Juliet's papa. One had always to apply to Mr. Deering if there was anything to be said about the lessons. Mrs. Deering lay on her lounge up-stairs, reading relays of dog-eared novels, the choice of which she left to the cook and the nurse, who were always fetching them for her from the *cabinet de lecture*; and it was understood in the house that she was not to be "bothered" about Juliet. Mr. Deering's interest in his daughter was fitful rather than consecutive; but at least he was approachable, and listened sympathetically, if a little absently, stroking his long fair moustache, while Lizzie stated her difficulty or put in her plea for maps or copy-books.

"Yes, yes—of course—whatever you think right," he would always assent, sometimes drawing a five-franc piece from his pocket, and laying it carelessly on the table, or oftener saying, with his charming smile: "Get what you please, and just put it on your account, you know."

But this time Lizzie had not come to ask for maps or copybooks, or even to hint, in crimson misery—as once, poor soul! she had had to do—that Mr. Deering had overlooked her last little account—had probably not noticed that she had left it, some two months earlier, on a corner of his littered writing-table. That hour had been bad enough, though he had done his best to carry it off gallantly and gaily; but this was infinitely worse. For she had come to complain of her pupil; to say that, much as she loved little Juliet, it was useless, unless Mr. Deering could "do something," to go on with the lessons.

"It wouldn't be honest—I should be robbing you; I'm not sure that I haven't already," she half laughed, through mounting tears, as she put her case. Little Juliet would not work, would not obey. Her poor little drifting existence floated aimlessly between the kitchen and the

lingerie, and all the groping tendrils of her curiosity were fastened about the life of the backstairs.

It was the same kind of curiosity that Mrs. Deering, overhead in her drug-scented room, lavished on her dog-eared novels and on the “society notes” of the morning paper; but since Juliet’s horizon was not yet wide enough to embrace these loftier objects, her interest was centred in the anecdotes that Céleste and Suzanne brought back from the market and the library. That these were not always of an edifying nature the child’s artless prattle too often betrayed; but unhappily they occupied her fancy to the complete exclusion of such nourishing items as dates and dynasties, and the sources of the principal European rivers.

At length the crisis became so acute that poor Lizzie felt herself bound to resign her charge or ask Mr. Deering’s intervention; and for Juliet’s sake she chose the harder alternative. It was hard to speak to him not only because one hated to confess one’s failure, and hated still more to ascribe it to such vulgar causes, but because one blushed to bring them to the notice of a spirit engaged with higher things. Mr. Deering was very busy at that moment: he had a new picture “on.” And Lizzie entered the studio with the flutter of one profanely intruding on some sacred rite; she almost heard the rustle of retreating wings as she approached.

And then—and then—how differently it had all turned out! Perhaps it wouldn’t have, if she hadn’t been such a goose—she who so seldom cried, so prided herself on a stoic control of her little twittering cageful of “feelings.” But if she had cried, it was because he had looked at her so kindly, and because she had nevertheless felt him so pained and shamed by what she said. The pain, of course, lay for both in the implication behind her words—in the one word she left unspoken. If little Juliet was as she was, it was because of the mother up-stairs—the mother who had given the child her frivolous impulses, and grudged her the care that might have corrected them. The case so obviously revolved in its own vicious circle that when

Mr. Deering had murmured, "Of course if my wife were not an invalid," they both turned with a spring to the flagrant "bad example" of Céleste and Suzanne, fastening on that with a mutual insistence that ended in his crying out: "All the more, then, how can you leave her to them?"

"But if I do her no good?" Lizzie wailed; and it was then that, when he took her hand and assured her gently, "But you do, you do!"—it was then that, in the traditional phrase, she "broke down," and her poor little protest quivered off into tears.

"You do *me* good, at any rate—you make the house seem less like a desert," she heard him say; and the next moment she felt herself drawn to him, and they kissed each other through her weeping.

They kissed each other—there was the new fact. One does not, if one is a poor little teacher living in Mme. Clopin's Pension Suisse at Passy, and if one has pretty brown hair and eyes that reach out trustfully to other eyes—one does not, under these common but defenceless conditions, arrive at the age of twenty-five without being now and then kissed—waylaid once by a noisy student between two doors, surprised once by one's grey-bearded professor as one bent over the "theme" he was correcting—but these episodes, if they tarnish the surface, do not reach the heart: it is not the kiss endured, but the kiss returned, that lives. And Lizzie West's first kiss was for Vincent Deering.

As she drew back from it, something new awoke in her—something deeper than the fright and the shame, and the penitent thought of Mrs. Deering. A sleeping germ of life thrilled and unfolded, and started out to seek the sun.

She might have felt differently, perhaps—the shame and penitence might have prevailed—had she not known him so kind and tender, and guessed him so baffled, poor and disappointed. She knew the failure of his married life, and she divined a corresponding failure in his artistic career. Lizzie, who had made her own faltering snatch at the same laurels, brought her thwarted proficiency to bear on the

question of his pictures, which she judged to be remarkable, but suspected of having somehow failed to affirm their merit publicly. She understood that he had tasted an earlier moment of success: a *mention*, a medal, something official and tangible; then the tide of publicity had somehow set the other way, and left him stranded in a noble isolation. It was incredible that any one so naturally eminent and exceptional should have been subject to the same vulgar necessities that governed her own life, should have known poverty and obscurity and indifference. But she gathered that this had been the case, and felt that it formed the miraculous link between them. For through what medium less revealing than that of shared misfortune would he ever have perceived so inconspicuous an object as herself? And she recalled now how gently his eyes had rested on her from the first—the grey eyes that might have seemed mocking if they had not seemed so gentle.

She remembered how kindly he had met her the first day, when Mrs. Deering's inevitable headache had prevented her receiving the new teacher. Insensibly he had led Lizzie to talk of herself and his questions had at once revealed his interest in the little stranded compatriot doomed to earn a precarious living so far from her native shore. Sweet as the moment of unburdening had been, she wondered afterward what had determined it: how she, so shy and sequestered, had found herself letting slip her whole poverty-stricken story, even to the avowal of the ineffectual "artistic" tendencies that had drawn her to Paris, and had then left her there to the dry task of tuition. She wondered at first, but she understood now; she understood everything after he had kissed her. It was simply because he was as kind as he was great.

She thought of this now as she mounted the hill in the spring sunshine, and she thought of all that had happened since. The intervening months, as she looked back at them, were merged in a vast golden haze, through which here and there rose the outline of a shining island. The haze was the general enveloping sense of his

love, and the shining islands were the days they had spent together. They had never kissed again under his own roof. Lizzie's professional honour had a keen edge, but she had been spared the necessity of making him feel it. It was of the essence of her fatality that he always "understood" when his failing to do so might have imperilled his hold on her.

But her Thursdays and Sundays were free, and it soon became a habit to give them to him. She knew, for her peace of mind, only too much about pictures, and galleries and churches had been the one outlet from the greyness of her personal conditions. For poetry, too, and the other imaginative forms of literature, she had always felt more than she had hitherto had occasion to betray; and now all these folded sympathies shot out their tendrils to the light. Mr. Deering knew how to express with unmatched clearness the thoughts that trembled in her mind: to talk with him was to soar up into the azure on the outspread wings of his intelligence, and look down, dizzily yet clearly, on all the wonders and glories of the world. She was a little ashamed, sometimes, to find how few definite impressions she brought back from these flights; but that was doubtless because her heart beat so fast when he was near, and his smile made his words seem like a long quiver of light. Afterward, in quieter hours, fragments of their talk emerged in her memory with wondrous precision, every syllable as minutely chiselled as some of the delicate objects in crystal or ivory that he pointed out in the museums they frequented. It was always a puzzle to Lizzie that some of their hours should be so blurred and others so vivid.

She was reliving all these memories with unusual distinctness, because it was a fortnight since she had seen her friend. Mrs. Deering, some six weeks previously, had gone to visit a relative at St.-Raphaël; and, after she had been a month absent, her husband and the little girl had joined her. Lizzie's adieux to Deering had been made on a rainy afternoon in the damp corridors of the Aquarium at the Trocadéro. She could not receive him at her own *pension*. That a

teacher should be visited by the father of a pupil, especially when that father was still, as Madame Clopin said, *si bien*, was against that lady's austere Helvetian code. And from Deering's first tentative hint of another solution Lizzie had recoiled in a wild flurry of all her scruples. He took her "No, no, *no!*" as he took all her twists and turns of conscience, with eyes half-tender and half-mocking, and an instant acquiescence which was the finest homage to the "lady" she felt he divined and honoured in her.

So they continued to meet in museums and galleries, or to extend, on fine days, their explorations to the suburbs, where now and then, in the solitude of grove or garden, the kiss renewed itself, fleeting, isolated, or prolonged in a shy pressure of the hand. But on the day of his leave-taking the rain kept them under cover; and as they threaded the subterranean windings of the Aquarium, and Lizzie gazed unseeingly at the grotesque faces glaring at her through walls of glass, she felt like a drowned wretch at the bottom of the sea, with all her sunlit memories rolling over her like the waves of its surface.

"You'll never see him again—never see him again," the waves boomed in her ears through his last words; and when she had said good-bye to him at the corner, and had scrambled, wet and shivering, into the Passy omnibus, its grinding wheels took up the derisive burden—"Never see him, never see him again."

All that was only two weeks ago, and here she was, as happy as a lark, mounting the hill to his door in the fresh spring sunshine! So weak a heart did not deserve such a radiant fate; and Lizzie said to herself that she would never again distrust her star.

II

The cracked bell tinkled sweetly through her heart as she stood listening for Juliet's feet. Juliet, anticipating the laggard Suzanne, almost always opened the door for her governess, not from any eagerness to hasten the hour of her studies, but from the irrepressible desire to see what was going on in the street. But doubtless on this

occasion some unusually absorbing incident had detained the child below-stairs; for Lizzie, after vainly waiting for a step, had to give the bell a second twitch. Even a third produced no response, and Lizzie, full of dawning fears, drew back to look up at the house. She saw that the studio shutters stood wide, and then noticed, without surprise, that Mrs. Deering's were still unopened. No doubt Mrs. Deering was resting after the fatigue of the journey. Instinctively Lizzie's eyes turned again to the studio window; and as she looked, she saw Deering approach it. He caught sight of her, and an instant later was at the door. He looked paler than usual, and she noticed that he wore a black coat.

"I rang and rang—where is Juliet?" she asked.

He looked at her gravely; then, without answering, he led her down the passage to the studio, and closed the door when she had entered.

"My wife is dead—she died suddenly ten days ago. Didn't you see it in the papers?" he said.

Lizzie, with a cry, sank down on the rickety divan propped against the wall. She seldom saw a newspaper, since she could not afford one for her own perusal, and those supplied to the Pension Clopin were usually in the hands of its more privileged lodgers till long after the hour when she set out on her morning round.

"No; I didn't see it," she stammered.

Deering was silent. He stood twisting an unlit cigarette in his hand, and looking down at her with a gaze that was both constrained and hesitating.

She, too, felt the constraint of the situation, the impossibility of finding words which, after what had passed between them, should seem neither false nor heartless; and at last she exclaimed, standing up: "Poor little Juliet! Can't I go to her?"

"Juliet is not here. I left her at St.-Raphaël with the relations with whom my wife was staying."

"Oh," Lizzie murmured, feeling vaguely that this added to the

difficulty of the moment. How differently she had pictured their meeting!

"I'm so—so sorry for her!" she faltered.

Deering made no reply, but, turning on his heel, walked the length of the studio and halted before the picture on the easel. It was the landscape he had begun the previous autumn, with the intention of sending it to the Salon that spring. But it was still unfinished—seemed, indeed, hardly more advanced than on the fateful October day when Lizzie, standing before it for the first time, had confessed her inability to deal with Juliet. Perhaps the same thought struck its creator, for he broke into a dry laugh and turned from the easel with a shrug.

Under his protracted silence Lizzie roused herself to the fact that, since her pupil was absent, there was no reason for her remaining any longer; and as Deering approached her she rose and said with an effort: "I'll go, then. You'll send for me when she comes back?"

Deering still hesitated, tormenting the cigarette between his fingers.

"She's not coming back—not at present."

Lizzie heard him with a drop of the heart. Was everything to be changed in their lives? Of course; how could she have dreamed it would be otherwise? She could only stupidly repeat: "Not coming back? Not this spring?"

"Probably not, since our friends are so good as to keep her. The fact is, I've got to go to America. My wife left a little property, a few pennies, that I must go and see to—for the child."

Lizzie stood before him, a cold knife in her breast. "I see—I see," she reiterated, feeling all the while that she strained her eyes into utter blackness.

"It's a nuisance, having to pull up stakes," he went on, with a fretful glance about the studio.

She lifted her eyes to his face. "Shall you be gone long?" she took courage to ask.

"There again—I can't tell. It's all so mixed up." He met her look for an incredibly long strange moment. "I hate to go!" he murmured abruptly.

Lizzie felt a rush of moisture to her lashes, and the familiar wave of weakness at her heart. She raised her hand to her face with an instinctive gesture, and as she did so he held out his arms.

"Come here, Lizzie!" he said.

And she went—went with a sweet wild throb of liberation, with the sense that at last the house was his, that *she* was his, if he wanted her; that never again would that silent presence in the room above constrain and shame her rapture.

He pushed back her veil and covered her face with kisses. "Don't cry, you little goose!" he said.

III

That they must see each other before his departure, in some place less exposed than their usual haunts, was as clear to Lizzie as it appeared to be to Deering. His expressing the wish seemed, indeed, the sweetest testimony to the quality of his feeling, since, in the first weeks of the most perfunctory widowerhood, a man of his stamp is presumed to abstain from light adventures. If, then, he wished so much to be quietly and gravely with her, it could be only for reasons she did not call by name, but of which she felt the sacred tremor in her heart; and it would have seemed to her vain and vulgar to put forward, at such a moment, the conventional objections with which such little exposed existences defend the treasure of their freshness.

In such a mood as this one may descend from the Passy omnibus at the corner of the Pont de la Concorde (she had not let him fetch her in a cab) with a sense of dedication almost solemn, and may advance to meet one's fate, in the shape of a gentleman of melancholy elegance, with an auto-taxi at his call, as one has advanced to the altar-steps in some girlish bridal vision.

Even the experienced waiter ushering them into an upper room of

the quiet restaurant on the Seine could hardly have supposed their quest for privacy to be based on the familiar motive, so soberly did Deering give his orders, while his companion sat small and grave at his side. She did not, indeed, mean to let her distress obscure their hour together: she was already learning that Deering shrank from sadness. He should see that she had courage and gaiety to face their coming separation, and yet give herself meanwhile to this completer nearness; but she waited, as always, for him to strike the opening note.

Looking back at it later, she wondered at the sweetness of the hour. Her heart was unversed in happiness, but he had found the tone to lull her fears, and make her trust her fate for any golden wonder. Deepest of all, he gave her the sense of something tacit and established between them, as if his tenderness were a habit of the heart hardly needing the support of outward proof.

Such proof as he offered came, therefore, as a kind of crowning luxury, the flowering of a profoundly rooted sentiment; and here again the instinctive reserves and defences would have seemed to vulgarise what his confidence ennobled. But if all the tender casuistries of her heart were at his service, he took no grave advantage of them. Even when they sat alone after dinner, with the lights of the river trembling through their one low window, and the rumour of Paris enclosing them in a heart of silence, he seemed, as much as herself, under the spell of hallowing influences. She felt it most of all as she yielded to the arm he presently put about her, to the long caress he laid on her lips and eyes: not a word or gesture missed the note of quiet understanding, or cast a doubt, in retrospect, on the pact they sealed with their last look.

That pact, as she reviewed it through a sleepless night, seemed to have consisted mainly, on his part, in pleadings for full and frequent news of her, on hers in the promise that it should be given as often as he wrote to ask it. She did not wish to show too much eagerness, too great a desire to affirm and define her hold on him. Her life had

given her a certain acquaintance with the arts of defence: girls in her situation were supposed to know them all, and to use them as occasion called. But Lizzie's very need of them had intensified her disdain. Just because she was so poor, and had always, materially, so to count her change and calculate her margin, she would at least know the joy of emotional prodigality, and give her heart as recklessly as the rich their millions. She was sure now that Deering loved her, and if he had seized the occasion of their farewell to give her some definitely worded sign of his feeling—if, more plainly, he had asked her to marry him—his doing so would have seemed less a proof of his sincerity than of his suspecting in her the need of such a warrant. That he had abstained seemed to show that he trusted her as she trusted him, and that they were one most of all in this complete security of understanding.

She had tried to make him guess all this in the chariness of her promise to write. She would write; of course she would. But he would be busy, preoccupied, on the move: it was for him to let her know when he wished a word, to spare her the embarrassment of ill-timed intrusions.

"Intrusions?" He had smiled the word away. "You can't well intrude, my darling, on a heart where you're already established to the complete exclusion of other lodgers." And then, taking her hands, and looking up from them into her happy dizzy eyes: "You don't know much about being in love, do you, Lizzie?" he laughingly ended.

It seemed easy enough to reject this imputation in a kiss; but she wondered afterward if she had not deserved it. Was she really cold and conventional, and did other women give more richly and recklessly? She found that it was possible to turn about every one of her reserves and delicacies so that they looked like selfish scruples and petty pruderies, and at this game she came in time to exhaust all the resources of casuistry.

Meanwhile the first days after Deering's departure wore a soft

refracted light like the radiance lingering after sunset. *He*, at any rate, was taxable with no reserves, no calculations, and his letters of farewell, from train and steamer, filled her with long murmurs and echoes of his presence. How he loved her, how he loved her—and how he knew how to tell her so!

She was not sure of possessing the same gift. Unused to the expression of personal emotion, she wavered between the impulse to pour out all she felt and the fear lest her extravagance should amuse or even bore him. She never lost the sense that what was to her the central crisis of experience must be a mere episode in a life so predestined as his to romantic incidents. All that she felt and said would be subjected to the test of comparison with what others had already given him: from all quarters of the globe she saw passionate missives winging their way toward Deering, for whom her poor little swallow-flight of devotion could certainly not make a summer. But such moments were succeeded by others in which she raised her head and dared affirm her conviction that no woman had ever loved him just as she had, and that none, therefore, had probably found just such things to say to him. And this conviction strengthened the other less solidly based belief that *he* also, for the same reason, had found new accents to express his tenderness, and that the three letters she wore all day in her shabby blouse, and hid all night beneath her pillow, not only surpassed in beauty, but differed in quality from, all he had ever penned for other eyes.

They gave her, at any rate, during the weeks that she wore them on her heart, sensations more complex and delicate than Deering's actual presence had ever produced. To be with him was always like breasting a bright rough sea that blinded while it buoyed her; but his letters formed a still pool of contemplation, above which she could bend, and see the reflection of the sky, and the myriad movements of the life that flitted and gleamed below the surface. The wealth of this hidden life—that was what most surprised her! She had had no inkling of it, but had kept on along the narrow track of habit, like a

traveller climbing a road in a fog, and suddenly finding himself on a sunlit crag between leagues of sky and dizzy depths of valley. And the odd thing was that all the people about her—the whole world of the Passy pension—seemed plodding along the same dull path, preoccupied with the pebbles under foot, and unaware of the glory beyond the fog!

There were hours of exultation, when she longed to cry out to them what one saw from the summit—and hours of abasement, when she asked herself why *her* feet had been guided there, while others, no doubt as worthy, stumbled and blundered in obscurity. She felt, in particular, an urgent pity for the two or three other girls at Mme. Clopin's—girls older, duller, less alive than she, and by that very token more thrown upon her sympathy. Would they ever know? Had they ever known?—those were the questions that haunted her as she crossed her companions on the stairs, faced them at the dinner-table, and listened to their poor pining talk in the dimly-lit slippery-seated *salon*. One of the girls was Swiss, another English; a third, Andora Macy, was a young lady from the Southern States who was studying French with the ultimate object of imparting it to the inmates of a girls' school at Macon, Georgia.

Andora Macy was pale, faded, immature. She had a drooping accent, and a manner which fluctuated between arch audacity and fits of panicky hauteur. She yearned to be admired, and feared to be insulted; and yet seemed wistfully conscious that she was destined to miss both these extremes of sensation, or to enjoy them only in the experiences of her more privileged friends.

It was perhaps for this reason that she took a tender interest in Lizzie, who had shrunk from her at first, as the depressing image of her own probable future, but to whom she now suddenly became an object of sentimental pity.

IV

Miss Macy's room was next to Miss West's, and the Southerner's

knock often appealed to Lizzie's hospitality when Mme. Clopin's early curfew had driven her boarders from the *salon*. It sounded thus one evening, just as Lizzie, tired from an unusually long day of tuition, was in the act of removing her dress. She was in too indulgent a mood to withhold her "Come in," and as Miss Macy crossed the threshold, Lizzie felt that Vincent Deering's first letter—the letter from the train—had slipped from her bosom to the floor.

Miss Macy, as promptly aware, darted forward to recover it. Lizzie stooped also, instinctively jealous of her touch; but the visitor reached the letter first, and as she seized it, Lizzie knew that she had seen whence it fell, and was weaving round the incident a rapid web of romance.

Lizzie blushed with annoyance. "It's too stupid, having no pockets! If one gets a letter as one is going out in the morning, one has to carry it in one's blouse all day."

Miss Macy looked at her fondly. "It's warm from your heart!" she breathed, reluctantly yielding up the missive.

Lizzie laughed, for she knew it was the letter that had warmed her heart. Poor Andora Macy! *She* would never know. Her bleak bosom would never take fire from such a contact. Lizzie looked at her with kind eyes, chafing at the injustice of fate.

The next evening, on her return home, she found her friend hovering in the entrance hall.

"I thought you'd like me to put this in your own hand," Andora whispered significantly, pressing a letter upon Lizzie. "I couldn't *bear* to see it lying on the table with the others."

It was Deering's letter from the steamer. Lizzie blushed to the forehead, but without resenting Andora's divination. She could not have breathed a word of her bliss, but she was not sorry to have it guessed, and pity for Andora's destitution yielded to the pleasure of using it as a mirror for her own abundance.

Deering wrote again on reaching New York, a long fond dissatisfied letter, vague in its indication to his own projects, specific

in the expression of his love. Lizzie brooded over every syllable till they formed the undercurrent of all her waking thoughts, and murmured through her midnight dreams; but she would have been happier if they had shed some definite light on the future.

That would come, no doubt, when he had had time to look about and get his bearings. She counted up the days that must elapse before she received his next letter, and stole down early to peep at the papers, and learn when the next American mail was due. At length the happy date arrived, and she hurried distractedly through the day's work, trying to conceal her impatience by the endearments she bestowed upon her pupils. It was easier, in her present mood, to kiss them than to keep them at their grammars.

That evening, on Mme. Clopin's threshold, her heart beat so wildly that she had to lean a moment against the door-post before entering. But on the hall table, where the letters lay, there was none for her.

She went over them with an impatient hand, her heart dropping down and down, as she had sometimes fallen down an endless stairway in a dream—the very same stairway up which she had seemed to fly when she climbed the long hill to Deering's door. Then it struck her that Andora might have found and secreted her letter, and with a spring she was on the actual stairs, and rattling Miss Macy's door-handle.

"You've a letter for me, haven't you?" she panted.

Miss Macy enclosed her in attenuated arms. "Oh, darling, did you expect another?"

"Do give it to me!" Lizzie pleaded with eager eyes.

"But I haven't any! There hasn't been a sign of a letter for you."

"I know there is. There *must* be," Lizzie cried, stamping her foot.

"But, dearest, I've *watched* for you, and there's been nothing."

Day after day, for the ensuing weeks, the same scene reenacted itself with endless variations. Lizzie, after the first sharp spasm of disappointment, made no effort to conceal her anxiety from Miss Macy, and the fond Andora was charged to keep a vigilant eye upon

the postman's coming, and to spy on the *bonne* for possible negligence or perfidy. But these elaborate precautions remained fruitless, and no letter from Deering came.

During the first fortnight of silence, Lizzie exhausted all the ingenuities of explanation. She marvelled afterward at the reasons she had found for Deering's silence: there were moments when she almost argued herself into thinking it more natural than his continuing to write. There was only one reason which her intelligence rejected; and that was the possibility that he had forgotten her, that the whole episode had faded from his mind like a breath from a mirror. From that she resolutely averted her thoughts, conscious that if she suffered herself to contemplate it, the motive power of life would fail, and she would no longer understand why she rose in the morning and lay down at night.

If she had had leisure to indulge her anguish she might have been unable to keep such speculations at bay. But she had to be up and working: the *blanchisseuse* had to be paid, and Mme. Clopin's weekly bill, and all the little "extras" that even her frugal habits had to reckon with. And in the depths of her thought dwelt the dogging fear of illness and incapacity, goading her to work while she could. She hardly remembered the time when she had been without that fear; it was second nature now, and it kept her on her feet when other incentives might have failed. In the blankness of her misery she felt no dread of death; but the horror of being ill and "dependent" was in her blood.

In the first weeks of silence she wrote again and again to Deering, entreating him for a word, for a mere sign of life. From the first she had shrunk from seeming to assert any claim on his future, yet in her bewilderment she now charged herself with having been too possessive, too exacting in her tone. She told herself that his fastidiousness shrank from any but a "light touch," and that hers had not been light enough. She should have kept to the character of the "little friend," the artless consciousness in which tormented genius

may find an escape from its complexities; and instead, she had dramatised their relation, exaggerated her own part in it, presumed, forsooth, to share the front of the stage with him, instead of being content to serve as scenery or chorus.

But though, to herself, she admitted, and even insisted on, the episodic nature of the experience, on the fact that for Deering it could be no more than an incident, she was still convinced that his sentiment for her, however fugitive, had been genuine.

His had not been the attitude of the unscrupulous male seeking a vulgar “advantage.” For a moment he had really needed her, and if he was silent now, it was perhaps because he feared that she had mistaken the nature of the need, and built vain hopes on its possible duration.

It was of the essence of Lizzie’s devotion that it sought, instinctively, the larger freedom of its object; she could not conceive of love under any form of exaction or compulsion. To make this clear to Deering became an overwhelming need, and in a last short letter she explicitly freed him from whatever sentimental obligation its predecessors might have seemed to impose. In this communication she playfully accused herself of having unwittingly sentimentalised their relation, affecting, in self-defence, a retrospective astuteness, a sense of the impermanence of the tenderer sentiments, that almost put Deering in the position of having mistaken coquetry for surrender. And she ended, gracefully, with a plea for the continuance of the friendly regard which she had “always understood” to be the basis of their sympathy. The document, when completed, seemed to her worthy of what she conceived to be Deering’s conception of a woman of the world—and she found a spectral satisfaction in the thought of making her final appearance before him in this distinguished character. But she was never destined to learn what effect the appearance produced; for the letter, like those it sought to excuse, remained unanswered.

The fresh spring sunshine which had so often attended Lizzie West on her dusty climb up the hill of St.-Cloud, beamed on her, some two years later in a scene and a situation of altered import.

Its rays, filtered through the horse-chestnuts of the Champs Elysées, shone on the gravelled circle about Laurent's restaurant; and Miss West, seated at a table within that privileged space, presented to the light a hat much better able to sustain its scrutiny than those which had shaded the brow of Juliet Deering's instructress.

Her dress was in keeping with the hat, and both belonged to a situation rife with such possibilities as the act of a leisurely luncheon at Laurent's in the opening week of the Salon. Her companions, of both sexes, confirmed this impression by an appropriateness of attire and an ease of manner implying the largest range of selection between the forms of Parisian idleness; and even Andora Macy, seated opposite, as in the place of co-hostess or companion, reflected, in coy greys and mauves, the festal note of the occasion.

This note reverberated persistently in the ears of a solitary gentleman straining for glimpses of the group from a table wedged in the remotest corner of the garden; but to Miss West herself the occurrence did not rise above the usual. For nearly a year she had been acquiring the habit of such situations, and the act of offering a luncheon at Laurent's to her cousins, the Harvey Mearses of Providence, and their friend Mr. Jackson Benn, produced in her no emotion beyond the languid glow which Mr. Benn's presence was beginning to impart to such scenes.

"It's frightful, the way you've got used to it," Andora Macy had wailed, in the first days of her friend's transfigured fortunes, when Lizzie West had waked one morning to find herself among the heirs of an ancient miserly cousin whose testamentary dispositions had formed, since her earliest childhood, the subject of pleasantries and conjecture in her own improvident family. Old Hezron Mears had never given any sign of life to the luckless Wests; had perhaps hardly

been conscious of including them in the carefully drawn will which, following the old American convention, scrupulously divided his millions among his kin. It was by a mere genealogical accident that Lizzie, falling just within the golden circle, found herself possessed of a pittance sufficient to release her from the prospect of a long grey future in Mme. Clopin's *pension*.

The release had seemed wonderful at first; yet she presently found that it had destroyed her former world without giving her a new one. On the ruins of the old *pension* life bloomed the only flower that had ever sweetened her path; and beyond the sense of present ease, and the removal of anxiety for the future, her reconstructed existence blossomed with no compensating joys. She had hoped great things from the opportunity to rest, to travel, to look about her, above all, in various artful feminine ways, to be "nice" to the companions of her less privileged state; but such widenings of scope left her, as it were, but the more conscious of the empty margin of personal life beyond them. It was not till she woke to the leisure of her new days that she had the full sense of what was gone from them.

Their very emptiness made her strain to pack them with transient sensations: she was like the possessor of an unfurnished house, with random furniture and bric-a-brac perpetually pouring in "on approval." It was in this experimental character that Mr. Jackson Benn had fixed her attention, and the languid effort of her imagination to adjust him to her taste was seconded by the fond complicity of Andora, and by the smiling approval of her cousins. Lizzie did not discourage these attempts: she suffered serenely Andora's allusions to Mr. Benn's infatuation, and Mrs. Mears's boasts of his business standing. All the better if they could drape his narrow square-shouldered frame and round unwinking countenance in the trailing mists of sentiment: Lizzie looked and listened, not unhopeful of the miracle.

"I never saw anything like the way these Frenchmen stare! Doesn't it make you nervous, Lizzie?" Mrs. Mears broke out suddenly,

ruffling her feather boa about an outraged bosom. Mrs. Mears was still in that stage of development when her country-women taste to the full the peril of being exposed to the gaze of the licentious Gaul.

Lizzie roused herself from the contemplation of Mr. Benn's round baby cheeks and the square blue jaw resting on his perpendicular collar. "Is some one staring at me?" she asked.

"Don't turn round, whatever you do! There just over there, between the rhododendrons—the tall blond man alone at that table. Really, Harvey, I think you ought to speak to the head waiter, or something; though I suppose in one of these places they'd only laugh at you," Mrs. Mears shudderingly concluded.

Her husband, as if inclining to this probability, continued the undisturbed dissection of his chicken wing, but Mr. Benn, perhaps conscious that his situation demanded a more punctilious attitude, sternly revolved upon the parapet of his high collar in the direction of Mrs. Mears's glance.

"What, that fellow all alone over there? Why, *he's* not French; he's an American," he then proclaimed with a perceptible relaxing of the muscles.

"Oh!" murmured Mrs. Mears, as perceptibly disappointed, and Mr. Benn continued: "He came over on the steamer with me. He's some kind of an artist—a fellow named Deering. He was staring at *me*, I guess: wondering whether I was going to remember him. Why, how d' 'e do? How are you? Why, yes, of course; with pleasure—my friends, Mrs. Harvey Mears—Mr. Mears; my friends, Miss Macy and Miss West."

"I have the pleasure of knowing Miss West," said Vincent Deering with a smile.

VI

Even through his smile Lizzie had seen, in the first moment, how changed he was; and the impression of the change deepened to the point of pain when, a few days later, in reply to his brief note, she

granted him a private hour.

That the first sight of his writing—the first answer to her letters—should have come, after three long years, in the shape of this impersonal line, too curt to be called humble, yet revealing a consciousness of the past in the studied avoidance of its language! As she read, her mind flashed back over what she had dreamed his letters would be, over the exquisite answers she had composed above his name. There was nothing exquisite in the lines before her; but dormant nerves began to throb again at the mere touch of the paper he had touched, and she threw the note into the fire before she dared to reply to it.

Now that he was actually before her again, he became, as usual, the one live spot in her consciousness. Once more her tormented self sank back passive and numb, but now with all its power of suffering mysteriously transferred to the presence, so known yet so unknown, at the opposite corner of her hearth. She was still Lizzie West, and he was still Vincent Deering; but the Styx rolled between them, and she saw his face through its fog. It was his face, really, rather than his words, that told her, as she furtively studied it, the tale of failure and discouragement which had so blurred its handsome lines. She kept, afterward, no precise memory of the details of his narrative: the pain it evidently cost him to impart it was so much the sharpest fact in her new vision of him. Confusedly, however, she gathered that on reaching America he had found his wife's small property gravely impaired; and that, while lingering on to secure what remained of it, he had contrived to sell a picture or two, and had even known a moment of success, during which he received orders and set up a studio. Then the tide had ebbed, his work had remained on his hands, and a tedious illness, with its miserable sequel of debt, soon wiped out his advantage. There followed a period of eclipse, during which she inferred that he had tried his hand at divers means of livelihood, accepting employment from a fashionable house-decorator, designing wall-papers, illustrating magazine articles, and

acting for a time—she dimly understood—as the social tout of a new hotel desirous of advertising its restaurant. These disjointed facts were strung on a slender thread of personal allusions—references to friends who had been kind (jealously, she guessed them to be women), and to enemies who had schemed against him. But, true to his tradition of “correctness,” he carefully avoided the mention of names, and left her imagination to grope dimly through a crowded world in which there seemed little room for her small shy presence.

As she listened, her private grievance vanished beneath the sense of his unhappiness. Nothing he had said explained or excused his conduct to her; but he had suffered, he had been lonely, had been humiliated, and she felt, with a fierce maternal rage, that there was no possible justification for any scheme of things in which such facts were possible. She could not have said why: she simply knew that it hurt too much to see him hurt.

Gradually it came to her that her absence of resentment was due to her having so definitely settled her own future. She was glad she had decided—as she now felt she had—to marry Jackson Benn, if only for the sense of detachment it gave her in dealing with Vincent Deering. Her personal safety insured her the requisite impartiality, and justified her in lingering as long as she chose over the last lines of a chapter to which her own act had fixed the close. Any lingering hesitations as to the finality of this decision were dispelled by the need of making it known to Deering; and when her visitor paused in his reminiscences to say, with a sigh, “But many things have happened to you too,” the words did not so much evoke the sense of her altered fortunes as the image of the suitor to whom she was about to entrust them.

“Yes, many things; it’s three years,” she answered.

Deering sat leaning forward, in his sad exiled elegance, his eyes gently bent on hers; and at his side she saw the form of Mr. Jackson Benn, with shoulders preternaturally squared by the cut of his tight black coat, and a tall shiny collar sustaining his baby cheeks and

hard blue chin. Then the vision faded as Deering began to speak.

"Three years," he repeated musingly. "I've so often wondered what they'd brought you."

She lifted her head with a blush, and the terrified wish that he should not—at the cost of all his notions of correctness—lapse into the blunder of becoming "personal."

"You've wondered?" she smiled back bravely.

"Do you suppose I haven't?" His look dwelt on her. "Yes, I dare say that *was* what you thought of me."

She had her answer pat—"Why, frankly, you know, I *didn't* think of you at all." But the mounting tide of her memories swept it indignantly away. If it was his correctness to ignore, it could never be hers to disavow!

"*Was* that what you thought of me?" she heard him repeat in a tone of sad insistence; and at that, with a lift of her head, she resolutely answered: "How could I know what to think? I had no word from you."

If she had expected, and perhaps almost hoped, that this answer would create a difficulty for him, the gaze of quiet fortitude with which he met it proved that she had underestimated his resources.

"No, you had no word. I kept my vow," he said.

"Your vow?"

"That you *shouldn't* have a word—not a syllable. Oh, I kept it through everything!"

Lizzie's heart was sounding in her ears the old confused rumour of the sea of life, but through it she desperately tried to distinguish the still small voice of reason.

"What was your vow? Why shouldn't I have had a syllable from you?"

He sat motionless, still holding her with a look so gentle that it almost seemed forgiving.

Then, abruptly, he rose, and crossing the space between them, sat down in a chair at her side. The movement might have implied a

forgetfulness of changed conditions, and Lizzie, as if thus viewing it, drew slightly back; but he appeared not to notice her recoil, and his eyes, at last leaving her face, slowly and approvingly made the round of the small bright drawing-room. "This is charming. Yes, things *have* changed for you," he said.

A moment before, she had prayed that he might be spared the error of a vain return upon the past. It was as if all her retrospective tenderness, dreading to see him at such a disadvantage, rose up to protect him from it. But his evasiveness exasperated her, and suddenly she felt the desire to hold him fast, face to face with his own words.

Before she could repeat her question, however, he had met her with another.

"You *did* think of me, then? Why are you afraid to tell me that you did?"

The unexpectedness of the challenge wrung a cry from her. "Didn't my letters tell you so enough?"

"Ah—your letters—" Keeping her gaze on his with unrelenting fixity, she could detect in him no confusion, not the least quiver of a nerve. He only gazed back at her more sadly.

"They went everywhere with me—your letters," he said.

"Yet you never answered them." At last the accusation trembled to her lips.

"Yet I never answered them."

"Did you ever so much as read them, I wonder?"

All the demons of self-torture were up in her now, and she loosed them on him as if to escape from their rage.

Deering hardly seemed to hear her question. He merely shifted his attitude, leaning a little nearer to her, but without attempting, by the least gesture, to remind her of the privileges which such nearness had once implied.

"There were beautiful, wonderful things in them," he said, smiling.

She felt herself stiffen under his smile. "You've waited three years

to tell me so!”

He looked at her with grave surprise. “And do you resent my telling you, even now?”

His parries were incredible. They left her with a sense of thrusting at emptiness, and a desperate, almost vindictive desire to drive him against the wall and pin him there.

“No. Only I wonder you should take the trouble to tell me, when at the time——”

And now, with a sudden turn, he gave her the final surprise of meeting her squarely on her own ground.

“When at the time I didn’t? But how *could* I—at the time?”

“Why couldn’t you? You’ve not yet told me.”

He gave her again his look of disarming patience. “Do I need to? Hasn’t my whole wretched story told you?”

“Told me why you never answered my letters?”

“Yes—since I could only answer them in one way: by protesting my love and my longing.”

There was a pause, of resigned expectancy on his part, on hers of a wild, confused reconstruction of her shattered past. “You mean, then, that you didn’t write because——”

“Because I found, when I reached America, that I was a pauper; that my wife’s money was gone, and that what I could earn—I’ve so little gift that way!—was barely enough to keep Juliet clothed and educated. It was as if an iron door had been locked and barred between us.”

Lizzie felt herself driven back, panting, on the last defences of her incredulity. “You might at least have told me—have explained. Do you think I shouldn’t have understood?”

He did not hesitate. “You would have understood. It wasn’t that.”

“What was it then?” she quavered.

“It’s wonderful you shouldn’t see! Simply that I couldn’t write you *that*. Anything else—not *that*!”

“And so you preferred to let me suffer?”

There was a shade of reproach in his eyes. "I suffered too," he said.

It was his first direct appeal to her compassion, and for a moment it nearly unsettled the delicate poise of her sympathies, and sent them trembling in the direction of scorn and irony. But even as the impulse rose it was stayed by another sensation. Once again, as so often in the past, she became aware of a fact which, in his absence, she always failed to reckon with; the fact of the deep irreducible difference between his image in her mind and his actual self—the mysterious alteration in her judgment produced by the inflections of his voice, the look of his eyes, the whole complex pressure of his personality. She had phrased it once, self-reproachfully, by saying to herself that she "never could remember him—" so completely did the sight of him supersede the counterfeit about which her fancy wove its perpetual wonders. Bright and breathing as that counterfeit was, it became a figment of the mind at the touch of his presence, and on this occasion the immediate result was to cause her to feel his possible unhappiness with an intensity beside which her private injury paled.

"I suffered horribly," he repeated, "and all the more that I couldn't make a sign, couldn't cry out my misery. There was only one escape from it all—to hold my tongue, and pray that you might hate me."

The blood rushed to Lizzie's forehead. "Hate you—you prayed that I might hate you?"

He rose from his seat, and moving closer, lifted her hand in his. "Yes; because your letters showed me that if you didn't, you'd be unhappier still."

Her hand lay motionless, with the warmth of his flowing through it, and her thoughts, too—her poor fluttering stormy thoughts—felt themselves suddenly penetrated by the same soft current of communion.

"And I meant to keep my resolve," he went on, slowly releasing his clasp. "I meant to keep it even after the random stream of things swept me back here, in your way; but when I saw you the other day I

felt that what had been possible at a distance was impossible now that we were near each other. How could I see you, and let you hate me?"

He had moved away, but not to resume his seat. He merely paused at a little distance, his hand resting on a chair-back, in the transient attitude that precedes departure.

Lizzie's heart contracted. He was going, then, and this was his farewell. He was going, and she could find no word to detain him but the senseless stammer: "I never hated you."

He considered her with a faint smile. "It's not necessary, at any rate, that you should do so now. Time and circumstances have made me so harmless—that's exactly why I've dared to venture back. And I wanted to tell you how I rejoice in your good fortune. It's the only obstacle between us that I can't bring myself to wish away."

Lizzie sat silent, spell-bound, as she listened, by the sudden evocation of Mr. Jackson Benn. He stood there again, between herself and Deering, perpendicular and reproachful, but less solid and sharply outlined than before, with a look in his small hard eyes that desperately waited for re-embodiment.

Deering was continuing his farewell speech. "You're rich now—you're free. You will marry." She saw him holding out his hand.

"It's not true that I'm engaged!" she broke out. They were the last words she had meant to utter; they were hardly related to her conscious thoughts; but she felt her whole will gathered up in the irrepressible impulse to repudiate and fling away from her forever the spectral claim of Mr. Jackson Benn.

VII

It was the firm conviction of Andora Macy that every object in the Vincent Deerings' charming little house at Neuilly had been expressly designed for the Deerings' son to play with.

The house was full of pretty things, some not obviously applicable to the purpose; but Miss Macy's casuistry was equal to the baby's

appetite, and the baby's mother was no match for them in the art of defending her possessions. There were moments, in fact, when she almost fell in with Andora's summary division of her works of art into articles safe or unsafe for the baby to lick, or resisted it only to the extent of occasionally substituting some less precious, or less perishable, object for the particular fragility on which her son's desire was fixed. And it was with this intention that, on a certain spring morning—which wore the added lustre of being the baby's second birthday—she had murmured, with her mouth in his curls, and one hand holding a bit of Chelsea above his clutch: "Wouldn't he rather have that beautiful shiny thing in Aunt Andora's hand?"

The two friends were together in Lizzie's morning-room—the room she had chosen, on acquiring the house, because, when she sat there, she could hear Deering's step as he paced up and down before his easel in the studio she had built for him. His step had been less regularly audible than she had hoped, for, after three years of wedded bliss, he had somehow failed to settle down to the great work which was to result from that state; but even when she did not hear him she knew that he was there, above her head, stretched out on the old divan from St.-Cloud, and smoking countless cigarettes while he skimmed the morning papers; and the sense of his nearness had not yet lost its first keen edge of wonder.

Lizzie herself, on the day in question, was engaged in a more arduous task than the study of the morning's news. She had never unlearned the habit of orderly activity, and the trait she least understood in her husband's character was his way of letting the loose ends of life hang as they would. She had been disposed to ascribe this to the chronic incoherence of his first *ménage*; but now she knew that, though he basked under her beneficent rule, he would never feel any impulse to further its work. He liked to see things fall into place about him at a wave of her wand; but his enjoyment of her household magic in no way diminished his smiling irresponsibility, and it was with one of its least amiable consequences that his wife

and her friend were now dealing.

Before them stood two travel-worn trunks and a distended portmanteau, which had shed their heterogeneous contents over Lizzie's rosy carpet. They represented the hostages left by her husband on his somewhat precipitate departure from a New York boarding-house, and redeemed by her on her learning, in a curt letter from his landlady, that the latter was not disposed to regard them as an equivalent for the arrears of Deering's board.

Lizzie had not been shocked by the discovery that her husband had left America in debt. She had too sad an acquaintance with the economic strain to see any humiliation in such accidents; but it offended her sense of order that he should not have liquidated his obligation in the three years since their marriage. He took her remonstrance with his usual good humour, and left her to forward the liberating draft, though her delicacy had provided him with a bank-account which assured his personal independence. Lizzie had discharged the duty without repugnance, since she knew that his delegating it to her was the result of his indolence and not of any design on her exchequer. Deering was not dazzled by money; his altered fortunes had tempted him to no excesses: he was simply too lazy to draw the cheque, as he had been too lazy to remember the debt it cancelled.

"No, dear! No!" Lizzie lifted the Chelsea higher. "Can't you find something for him, Andora, among that rubbish over there? Where's the beaded bag you had in your hand? I don't think it could hurt him to lick that."

Miss Macy, bag in hand, rose from her knees, and stumbled across the room through the frayed garments and old studio properties. Before the group of mother and son she fell into a rapturous attitude.

"Do look at him reach for it, the tyrant! Isn't he just like the young Napoleon?"

Lizzie laughed and swung her son in air. "Dangle it before him, Andora. If you let him have it too quickly, he won't care for it. He's

just like any man, I think.”

Andora slowly lowered the bag till the heir of the Deerings closed his masterful fist upon it. “There—my Chelsea’s safe!” Lizzie smiled, setting her boy on the floor, and watching him stagger away with his booty.

Andora stood beside her, watching too. “Do you know where that bag came from, Lizzie?”

Mrs. Deering, bent above a pile of discolored shirts, shook an inattentive head. “I never saw such wicked washing! There isn’t one that’s fit to mend. The bag? No; I’ve not the least idea.”

Andora surveyed her incredulously. “Doesn’t it make you utterly miserable to think that some woman may have made it for him?”

Lizzie, still bowed in scrutiny above the shirts, broke into a laugh. “Really, Andora, really! Six, seven, nine; no, there isn’t even a dozen. There isn’t a whole dozen of *anything*. I don’t see how men live alone.”

Andora broodingly pursued her theme. “Do you mean to tell me it doesn’t make you jealous to handle these things of his that other women may have given him?”

Lizzie shook her head again, and, straightening herself with a smile, tossed a bundle in her friend’s direction. “No, I don’t feel jealous. Here, count these socks for me, like a darling.”

Andora moaned “Don’t you feel *anything at all*?” as the socks landed in her hollow bosom; but Lizzie, intent upon her task, tranquilly continued to unfold and sort. She felt a great deal as she did so, but her feelings were too deep and delicate for the simplifying processes of speech. She only knew that each article she drew from the trunks sent through her the long tremor of Deering’s touch. It was part of her wonderful new life that everything belonging to him contained an infinitesimal fraction of himself—a fraction becoming visible in the warmth of her love as certain secret elements become visible in rare intensities of temperature. And in the case of the objects before her, poor shabby witnesses of his days of failure, what

they gave out acquired a special poignancy from its contrast to his present cherished state. His shirts were all in round dozens now, and washed as carefully as old lace. As for his socks, she knew the pattern of every pair, and would have liked to see the washerwoman who dared to mislay one, or bring it home with the colours “run”! And in these homely tokens of his well-being she saw the symbol of what her tenderness had brought him. He was safe in it, encompassed by it, morally and materially, and she defied the embattled powers of malice to reach him through the armour of her love. Such feelings, however, were not communicable, even had one desired to express them: they were no more to be distinguished from the sense of life itself than bees from the lime-blossoms in which they murmur.

“Oh, do *look* at him, Lizzie! He’s found out how to open the bag!”

Lizzie lifted her head to look a moment at her son, throned on a heap of studio rubbish, with Andora before him on adoring knees. She thought vaguely “Poor Andora!” and then resumed the discouraged inspection of a buttonless white waistcoat. The next sound she was conscious of was an excited exclamation from her friend.

“Why, Lizzie, do you know what he used the bag for? To keep your letters in!”

Lizzie looked up more quickly. She was aware that Andora’s pronoun had changed its object, and was now applied to Deering. And it struck her as odd, and slightly disagreeable, that a letter of hers should be found among the rubbish abandoned in her husband’s New York lodgings.

“How funny! Give it to me, please.”

“Give it to Aunt Andora, darling! Here—look inside, and see what else a big, big boy can find there!—Yes, here’s another! Why, why —”

Lizzie rose with a shade of impatience and crossed the floor to the romping group beside the other trunk.

“What is it? Give me the letters, please.” As she spoke, she suddenly recalled the day when, in Mme. Clopin’s *pension*, she had addressed a similar behest to Andora Macy.

Andora lifted to her a look of startled conjecture. “Why, this one’s never been opened! Do you suppose that awful woman could have kept it from him?”

Lizzie laughed. Andora’s imaginings were really puerile! “What awful woman? His landlady? Don’t be such a goose, Andora. How can it have been kept back from him, when we’ve found it among his things?”

“Yes; but then why was it never opened?”

Andora held out the letter, and Lizzie took it. The writing was hers; the envelope bore the Passy postmark; and it was unopened. She looked at it with a sharp drop of the heart.

“Why, so are the others—all unopened!” Andora threw out on a rising note; but Lizzie, stooping over, checked her.

“Give them to me, please.”

“Oh, Lizzie, Lizzie—” Andora, on her knees, held back the packet, her pale face paler with anger and compassion. “Lizzie, they’re the letters I used to post for you—the letters he never answered! *Look!*”

“Give them back to me, please.” Lizzie possessed herself of the letters.

The two women faced each other, Andora still kneeling, Lizzie motionless before her. The blood had rushed to her face, humming in her ears, and forcing itself into the veins of her temples. Then it ebbed, and she felt cold and weak.

“It must have been some plot—some conspiracy,” Andora cried, so fired by the ecstasy of invention that for the moment she seemed lost to all but the æsthetic aspect of the case.

Lizzie averted her eyes with an effort, and they rested on the boy, who sat at her feet placidly sucking the tassels of the bag. His mother stooped and extracted them from his rosy mouth, which a cry of wrath immediately filled. She lifted him in her arms, and for the first

time no current of life ran from his body into hers. He felt heavy and clumsy, like some other woman's child; and his screams annoyed her.

"Take him away, please, Andora."

"Oh, Lizzie, Lizzie!" Andora wailed.

Lizzie held out the child, and Andora, struggling to her feet, received him.

"I know just how you feel," she gasped, above the baby's head.

Lizzie, in some dark hollow of herself, heard the faint echo of a laugh. Andora always thought she knew how people felt!

"Tell Marthe to take him with her when she fetches Juliet home from school."

"Yes, yes." Andora gloated on her. "If you'd only give way, my darling!"

The baby, howling, dived over Andora's shoulder for the bag.

"Oh, *take* him!" his mother ordered.

Andora, from the door, cried out: "I'll be back at once. Remember, love, you're not alone!"

But Lizzie insisted, "Go with them—I wish you to go with them," in the tone to which Miss Macy had never learned the answer.

The door closed on her reproachful back, and Lizzie stood alone. She looked about the disordered room, which offered a dreary image of the havoc of her life. An hour or two ago, everything about her had been so exquisitely ordered, without and within: her thoughts and her emotions had all been outspread before her like jewels laid away symmetrically in a collector's cabinet. Now they had been tossed down helter-skelter among the rubbish there on the floor, and had themselves turned to rubbish like the rest. Yes, there lay her life at her feet, among all that tarnished trash.

She picked up her letters, ten in all, and examined the flaps of the envelopes. Not one had been opened—not one. As she looked, every word she had written fluttered to life, and every feeling prompting it sent a tremor through her. With vertiginous speed and microscopic distinctness of vision she was reliving that whole period of her life,

stripping bare again the ruin over which the drift of three happy years had fallen.

She laughed at Andora's notion of a conspiracy—of the letters having been “kept back.” She required no extraneous aid in deciphering the mystery: her three years' experience of Deering shed on it all the light she needed. And yet a moment before she had believed herself to be perfectly happy! Now it was the worst part of her pain that it did not really surprise her.

She knew so well how it must have happened. The letters had reached him when he was busy, occupied with something else, and had been put aside to be read at some future time—a time which never came. Perhaps on the steamer, even, he had met “some one else”—the “some one” who lurks, veiled and ominous, in the background of every woman's thoughts about her lover. Or perhaps he had been merely forgetful. She knew now that the sensations which he seemed to feel most intensely left no reverberations in his memory—that he did not relive either his pleasures or his pains. She needed no better proof than the lightness of his conduct toward his daughter. He seemed to have taken it for granted that Juliet would remain indefinitely with the friends who had received her after her mother's death, and it was at Lizzie's suggestion that the little girl was brought home and that they had established themselves at Neuilly to be near her school. But Juliet once with them, he became the model of a tender father, and Lizzie wondered that he had not felt the child's absence, since he seemed so affectionately aware of her presence.

Lizzie had noted all this in Juliet's case, but had taken for granted that her own was different; that she formed, for Deering, the exception which every woman secretly supposes herself to form in the experience of the man she loves. She had learned by this time that she could not modify his habits; but she imagined that she had deepened his sensibilities, had furnished him with an “ideal”—angelic function! And she now saw that the fact of her letters—her

unanswered letters—having, on his own assurance, “meant so much” to him, had been the basis on which this beautiful fabric was reared.

There they lay now, the letters, precisely as when they had left her hands. He had not had time to read them; and there had been a moment in her past when that discovery would have been to her the sharpest pang imaginable. She had travelled far beyond that point. She could have forgiven him now for having forgotten her; but she could never forgive him for having deceived her.

She sat down, and looked again about the room. Suddenly she heard his step overhead, and her heart contracted. She was afraid that he was coming down to her. She sprang up and bolted the door; then she dropped into the nearest chair, tremulous and exhausted, as if the act had required an immense effort. A moment later she heard him on the stairs, and her tremor broke into a fit of shaking. “I loathe you—I loathe you!” she cried.

She listened apprehensively for his touch on the handle of the door. He would come in, humming a tune, to ask some idle question and lay a caress on her hair. But no, the door was bolted; she was safe. She continued to listen, and the step passed on. He had not been coming to her, then. He must have gone downstairs to fetch something—another newspaper, perhaps. He seemed to read little else, and she sometimes wondered when he had found time to store the material that used to serve for their famous “literary” talks. The wonder shot through her again, barbed with a sneer. At that moment it seemed to her that everything he had ever done and been was a lie.

She heard the house door close, and started up. Was he going out? It was not his habit to leave the house in the morning.

She crossed the room to the window, and saw him walking, with a quick decided step, between the lilacs to the gate. What could have called him forth at that unusual hour? It was odd that he should not have told her. The fact that she thought it odd suddenly showed her how closely their lives were interwoven. She had become a habit to

him, and he was fond of his habits. But to her it was as if a stranger had opened the gate and gone out. She wondered what he would feel if he knew that she felt *that*.

"In an hour he will know," she said to herself, with a kind of fierce exultation; and immediately she began to dramatise the scene. As soon as he came in she meant to call him up to her room and hand him the letters without a word. For a moment she gloated on the picture; then her imagination recoiled. She was humiliated by the thought of humiliating him. She wanted to keep his image intact; she would not see him.

He had lied to her about her letters—had lied to her when he found it to his interest to regain her favour. Yes, there was the point to hold fast. He had sought her out when he learned that she was rich. Perhaps he had come back from America on purpose to marry her; no doubt he had come back on purpose. It was incredible that she had not seen this at the time. She turned sick at the thought of her fatuity and of the grossness of his arts. Well, the event proved that they were all he needed. . . But why had he gone out at such an hour? She was irritated to find herself still preoccupied by his comings and goings.

Turning from the window, she sat down again. She wondered what she meant to do next. . . No, she would not show him the letters; she would simply leave them on his table and go away. She would leave the house with her boy and Andora. It was a relief to feel a definite plan forming itself in her mind—something that her uprooted thoughts could fasten on. She would go away, of course; and meanwhile, in order not to see him, she would feign a headache, and remain in her room till after luncheon. Then she and Andora would pack a few things, and fly with the child while he was dawdling about up-stairs in the studio. When one's house fell, one fled from the ruins: nothing could be simpler, more inevitable.

Her thoughts were checked by the impossibility of picturing what would happen next. Try as she would, she could not see herself and

the child away from Deering. But that, of course, was because of her nervous weakness. She had youth, money, energy: all the trumps were on her side. It was much more difficult to imagine what would become of Deering. He was so dependent on her, and they had been so happy together! It struck her as illogical and even immoral, and yet she knew he had been happy with her. It never happened like that in novels: happiness “built on a lie” always crumbled, burying the presumptuous architect beneath its ruins. According to the laws of fiction, Deering, having deceived her once, would inevitably have gone on deceiving her. Yet she knew he had not gone on deceiving her. . .

She tried again to picture her new life. Her friends, of course, would rally about her. But the prospect left her cold; she did not want them to rally. She wanted only one thing—the life she had been living before she had given her baby the embroidered bag to play with. Oh, why had she given him the bag? She had been so happy, they had all been so happy! Every nerve in her clamoured for her lost happiness, angrily, irrationally, as the boy had clamoured for his bag! It was horrible to know too much; there was always blood in the foundations. Parents “kept things” from children—protected them from all the dark secrets of pain and evil. And was any life livable unless it were thus protected? Could any one look in the Medusa’s face and live?

But why should she leave the house, since it was hers? Here, with her boy and Andora, she could still make for herself the semblance of a life. It was Deering who would have to go; he would understand that as soon as he saw the letters.

She saw him going—leaving the house as he had left it just now. She saw the gate closing on him for the last time. Now her vision was acute enough: she saw him as distinctly as if he were in the room. Ah, he would not like returning to the old life of privations and expedients! And yet she knew he would not plead with her.

Suddenly a new thought seized her. What if Andora had rushed to

him with the tale of the discovery of the letters—with the “Fly, you are discovered!” of romantic fiction? What if he *had* left her for good? It would not be unlike him, after all. For all his sweetness he was always evasive and inscrutable. He might have said to himself that he would forestall her action, and place himself at once on the defensive. It might be that she *had* seen him go out of the gate for the last time.

She looked about the room again, as if the thought had given it a new aspect. Yes, this alone could explain her husband’s going out. It was past twelve o’clock, their usual luncheon hour, and he was scrupulously punctual at meals, and gently reproachful if she kept him waiting. Only some unwonted event could have caused him to leave the house at such an hour and with such marks of haste. Well, perhaps it was better that Andora should have spoken. She mistrusted her own courage; she almost hoped the deed had been done for her. Yet her next sensation was one of confused resentment. She said to herself “Why has Andora interfered?” She felt baffled and angry, as though her prey had escaped her. If Deering had been in the house she would have gone to him instantly and overwhelmed him with her scorn. But he had gone out, and she did not know where he had gone, and oddly mingled with her anger against him was the latent instinct of vigilance, the solicitude of the woman accustomed to watch over the man she loves. It would be strange never to feel that solicitude again, never to hear him say, with his hand on her hair: “You foolish child, were you worried? Am I late?”

The sense of his touch was so real that she stiffened herself against it, flinging back her head as if to throw off his hand. The mere thought of his caress was hateful; yet she felt it in all her veins. Yes, she felt it, but with horror and repugnance. It was something she wanted to escape from, and the fact of struggling against it was what made its hold so strong. It was as though her mind were sounding her body to make sure of its allegiance, spying on it for any secret movement of revolt . . .

To escape from the sensation, she rose and went again to the window. No one was in sight. But presently the gate began to swing back, and her heart gave a leap—she knew not whether up or down. A moment later the gate opened to admit a perambulator, propelled by the nurse and flanked by Juliet and Andora. Lizzie's eyes rested on the familiar group as if she had never seen it before, and she stood motionless, instead of flying down to meet the children.

Suddenly there was a step on the stairs, and she heard Andora's knock. She unbolted the door, and was strained to her friend's emaciated bosom.

"My darling!" Miss Macy cried. "Remember you have your child—and me!"

Lizzie loosened herself. She looked at Andora with a feeling of estrangement which she could not explain.

"Have you spoken to my husband?" she asked, drawing coldly back.

"Spoken to him? No." Andora stared at her, surprised. "Then you haven't met him since he went out?"

"No, my love. Is he out? I haven't met him."

Lizzie sat down with a confused sense of relief, which welled up to her throat and made speech difficult.

Suddenly light seemed to come to Andora. "I understand, dearest. You don't feel able to see him yourself. You want me to go to him for you." She looked eagerly about her, scenting the battle. "You're right, darling. As soon as he comes in, I'll go to him. The sooner we get it over, the better."

She followed Lizzie, who had turned restlessly back to the window. As they stood there, the gate moved again, and Deering entered.

"There he is now!" Lizzie felt Andora's excited clutch upon her arm. "Where are the letters? I will go down at once. You allow me to speak for you? You trust my woman's heart? Oh, believe me, darling," Miss Macy panted, "I shall know exactly what to say to him!"

“What to say to him?” Lizzie absently repeated.

As her husband advanced up the path she had a sudden vision of their three years together. Those years were her whole life; everything before them had been colourless and unconscious, like the blind life of the plant before it reaches the surface of the soil. The years had not been exactly what she had dreamed; but if they had taken away certain illusions they had left richer realities in their stead. She understood now that she had gradually adjusted herself to the new image of her husband as he was, as he would always be. He was not the hero of her dreams, but he was the man she loved, and who had loved her. For she saw now, in this last wide flash of pity and initiation, that, as a comely marble may be made out of worthless scraps of mortar, glass, and pebbles, so out of mean mixed substances may be fashioned a love that will bear the stress of life.

More urgently, she felt the pressure of Miss Macy’s hand.

“I shall hand him the letters without a word. You may rely, love, on my sense of dignity. I know everything you’re feeling at this moment!”

Deering had reached the doorstep. Lizzie watched him in silence till he disappeared under the projecting roof of the porch; then she turned and looked almost compassionately at her friend.

“Oh, poor Andora, you don’t know anything—you don’t know anything at all!” she said.

Chronology

1862

Born January 24 at 14 West 23rd Street, New York City, and baptized Edith Newbold Jones; third and last child of George Frederic Jones and Lucretia Stevens Rhinelanders (brothers are Frederic, b. 1846, and Henry, b. 1850). Parents belong to long-established, socially prominent New York families. Father's income based on Manhattan landholdings.

1865

Receives gift of spitz puppy, beginning a lifelong passion for small dogs.

1866

Post-Civil War depression in real estate market causes family to move to Europe for prolonged residence. Sails to England in November with parents, nurse Hannah Doyle ("Doyley"), and brother Henry, who begins law studies at Trinity Hall College, Cambridge.

1867

Family spends year in Rome.

1868

Family travels through Spain and settles in Paris. Taught to read by father; recites Tennyson for visiting maternal grandmother. Begins "making up," inventing stories using parents and their friends as characters.

1870-71

Stays at Wildbad, a spa in Württemberg, while mother takes water

cure. Studies New Testament in German, takes walks in Black Forest. Suffers severe attack of typhoid fever (later remembers convalescence as beginning of recurrent apprehension of “some dark undefinable menace forever dogging my steps, lurking and threatening”). Family settles in Florence at end of 1870.

1872–75

Family returns to the United States, dividing year between three-story brownstone on West 23rd Street, New York, and Pencraig, their summer home in Newport, Rhode Island. At Pencraig rides pony, swims in cove, watches archery contests, visits neighboring family of astronomer Lewis Rutherfurd. Studies French, medieval and romantic German poetry with Rutherfurd family governess, Anna Bahlmann (who later becomes her governess). Begins life-long friendship with sister-in-law Mary Cadwalader Jones, wife (later divorced) of brother Frederic. In father’s eight-hundred-volume New York library finds histories (including Plutarch, Macaulay, Carlyle, Parkman), diaries and correspondence (Pepys, Cowper, Madame de Sévigné), criticism (Sainte-Beuve), art history and archaeology (Ruskin, Schliemann), poetry (Homer and Dante in translation, most English poets, some French), and a few novels (Scott, Irving). Mother forbids the reading of contemporary fiction. Later remembers reading as “a secret ecstasy of communion.” Summer 1875, forms close friendship with Emelyn, daughter of Edward Abiel Washburn, rector of Calvary Church, New York.

1876–77

Begins *Fast and Loose*, 30,000-word novella about trials of ill-starred young lovers, autumn 1876. Keeps enterprise secret from everyone except Emelyn Washburn. Finished January 1877, manuscript includes mock hostile reviews (“every character is a failure, the plot a vacuum”).

1878–79

Verses, volume of twenty-nine poems, printed in Newport, arranged and paid for by mother. Summer 1879, Newport neighbor Allen Thorndike Rice shows some of the poems to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and then sends them to William Dean Howells. Howells publishes one in *Atlantic Monthly*. Makes social debut.

1880–81

Two poems appear in the *New York World*. Courted in New York, Newport, and Bar Harbor, Maine, by Henry Leyden Stevens, twenty-one-year-old son of prominent social figure, Mrs. Paran Stevens. November 1880, goes to southern France with mother and ailing father. Henry Stevens joins them September 1881.

1882

Father, age sixty-one, dies in Cannes in March. Inherits over \$20,000 in trust fund. August, engagement to Henry Stevens announced in Newport, with marriage scheduled for autumn. Engagement is broken off, apparently at insistence of Mrs. Stevens. Travels with mother to Paris.

1883

Spends summer at Bar Harbor. Meets Walter Van Rensselaer Berry, twenty-four-year-old Harvard graduate studying for admission to the District of Columbia bar. They become close, but Berry leaves without proposing marriage. In August, Edward Robbins (“Teddy”) Wharton, friend of brother Henry, arrives in Bar Harbor and begins courtship. A thirty-three-year-old Harvard graduate interested mainly in camping, hunting, fishing, and riding, he lives with his family in Boston and receives a \$2,000 annuity from them.

1884

Hires Catherine Gross, Alsatian immigrant, as personal attendant (she will be Wharton’s companion and housekeeper for over four decades).

1885–88

Marries Edward Wharton April 29, 1885, at Trinity Chapel, New York City. Henry Stevens dies of tuberculosis, July 18, 1885. Whartons move into Pencraig Cottage, small house on mother's Newport estate, leaving every February for four months of European travel, mostly in Italy. Introduced by Egerton Winthrop, wealthy New York art collector and their occasional traveling companion, to contemporary French literature and works of Darwin, Huxley, Spencer, Haeckel, and other writers on evolution. Whartons spend a year's income (about \$10,000) on four-month Aegean cruise, 1888. Learns in Athens that she has inherited \$120,000 from reclusive New York cousin Joshua Jones.

1889

Rents small house on Madison Avenue, New York City. Four poems accepted for publication by *Scribner's Magazine*, *Harper's Monthly*, and *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*.

1890–92

Suffers intermittently from inexplicable nausea and fatigue. Short story, "Mrs. Manstey's View," accepted by *Scribner's* May 1890, published July 1891. Purchases narrow house on Fourth Avenue near 78th Street (eventually 884 Park Avenue) for \$19,670 in November 1891. (A few years later acquires its adjoining twin at 882 Park for the household staff to live in.) Works on long short story, "Bunner Sisters." It is rejected by *Scribner's*, December 1892.

1893

Buys Land's End, Newport estate overlooking the Atlantic, for \$80,000 in March. Works with Boston architect Ogden Codman on decoration of its interior. French novelist Paul Bourget and his wife are guests. Three stories, "That Good May Come," "The Fulness of Life," and "The Lamp of Psyche," accepted by *Scribner's*, whose editor, Edward Burlingame, proposes a short-story volume for

Charles Scribner's Sons. Wharton agrees, suggesting inclusion of "Bunner Sisters." Sails for Europe in December.

1894–95

Burlingame rejects "Something Exquisite" (later revised and published as "Friends"). Writes to him from Florence, expressing gratitude for his criticism and doubt about her own abilities. Travels through Tuscany. Visits Violet Paget ("Vernon Lee"), English novelist and historian of eighteenth-century Italy. After research at monastery of San Vivaldo and in Florence museums, identifies group of terracotta sculptures, previously thought to date from the seventeenth century, as work of the late fifteenth–early sixteenth century school of the Robbias. Writes article for *Scribner's* on her findings and surrounding Tuscan landscape. Notifies Burlingame in July 1894 that short-story volume will need another six months to prepare. Suffering from intense exhaustion, nausea, and melancholia, breaks off correspondence with Burlingame for sixteen months. Mother moves to Paris (brothers Frederic and Henry both live in Europe); meetings and correspondence with her become infrequent. Writes "The Valley of Childish Things, and Other Emblems," collection of ten short fables, and sends it in December 1895 to Burlingame, who rejects it.

1896–97

Writes, with architect Ogden Codman, *The Decoration of Houses*, study of interior arrangements and furnishings in upper-class city homes. Shows incomplete manuscript to Burlingame, who gives it to William Brownell, senior editor at Scribner's. Summer 1897, resumes friendship with Walter Berry, who stays for a month at Land's End, assisting Wharton in the revision of *The Decoration of Houses* (Codman is incapacitated by sunstroke). Wharton persuades Brownell to increase the number of halftone plates and makes extensive recommendations concerning the book's design. Published by Scribner's December 1897; sales are unexpectedly good.

1898

Writes and revises seven stories between March and July, despite recurring illness. In letter to Burlingame, discusses her earliest stories: "I regard them as the excesses of youth. They were all written 'at the top of my voice,' & *The Fulness of Life* is one long shriek—I may not write any better, but at least I hope that I write in a lower key . . ." Suffers mental and physical breakdown in August. Goes to Philadelphia in October to take the "rest cure" invented by Dr. S. Weir Mitchell and is treated as an outpatient under Mitchell's supervision. Therapy involves massage, electrical stimulation of the muscles, abundant eating, and near total isolation.

1899

January, settles with Edward for four-month stay in house at 1329 K Street in Washington, found for them by Walter Berry, who becomes close literary adviser and supporter. *The Greater Inclination*, long-delayed collection of short stories, published by Scribner's in March to enthusiastic reviews; sales exceed 3,000 copies. Protests to Scribner's that book has been insufficiently advertised. Begins extensive correspondence with Sara Norton, daughter of Harvard professor Charles Eliot Norton. Summer, travels in Europe, joined by the Bourgets in Switzerland; tours northern Italy with them, through Bergamo and Val Camonica. Returns to Land's End in September. Seeking escape from Newport climate, visits Lenox, Massachusetts, in fall.

1900

Novella, *The Touchstone* (in England, *A Gift from the Grave*), appears in the March and April *Scribner's*; published by Scribner's in April, selling 5,000 copies by year's end. Travels in England, Paris, and northern Italy, again accompanied by the Bourgets. Spends summer and fall at inn in Lenox while Edward goes on yachting trip. Begins concerted work on novel *The Valley of Decision*. Sends Henry James

copy of “The Line of Least Resistance”; he responds with praise and detailed criticism, encouraging further effort. Wharton removes story from volume being prepared.

1901

February to June, negotiates purchase for \$40,600 of 113-acre Lenox property extending into the village of Lee. After breaking with Codman over his fee, hires architect Francis V. L. Hoppin to design house modeled on Christopher Wren’s Belton House in Lincolnshire, England. Oversees landscaping and gardening. *Crucial Instances*, second volume of stories, published by Scribner’s in April. Mother dies in Paris, age seventy-six, on June 28. Her will leaves large sums outright to Frederic and Henry but creates a trust fund for Wharton’s share of the remainder of the estate. Trust eventually amounts to \$90,000; total annual income from parents’ and Joshua Jones’s trusts is about \$22,000. Wharton visits London and Paris and persuades her brothers to make husband Edward co-trustee with brother Henry. Works on play *The Man of Genius* (never finished) and on dramatization of Prosper Mérimée’s *Manon Lescaut* (never produced).

1902

The Valley of Decision, historical novel set in eighteenth-century Italy, published by Scribner’s in February. Wharton criticizes its design while it is being prepared. Suffers collapse (nausea, depression, fatigue) after publication. Reviews are generally enthusiastic and sales are good. Begins *Disintegration*, novel set in contemporary New York society, but does not finish it. Writes travel articles, poetry, theatrical reviews, and literary criticism, including essays on Gabriele D’Annunzio and George Eliot. Translates Hermann Sudermann’s play *Es Lebe das Leben* as *The Joy of Living* (it runs briefly on Broadway and sells in book form for a number of years). Henry James writes Wharton in August that *The Valley of Decision* is “accomplished, pondered, saturated” and “brilliant and interesting from a literary point of view,” but urges her to abandon historical

subject matter “in favour of the American subject. There it is round you. Don’t pass it by—the immediate, the real, the only, the yours, the novelist’s that it waits for. Take hold of it and keep hold and let it pull you where it will . . . *Do New York!* The 1st-hand account is precious.” Meets Theodore Roosevelt in Newport at christening of his godchild, son of Wharton’s friends Margaret and Winthrop Chanler, beginning a long friendship. Moves into Lenox house, named “The Mount” after Long Island home of Revolutionary War ancestor Ebenezer Stevens, in September. Edward suffers first of series of nervous collapses.

1903

January, sails for Italy with ailing husband. Travels slowly north from Rome through Tuscany, the Veneto, and Lombardy, inspecting estates for series of articles commissioned by R. W. Gilder for *Century*. Enjoys her first automobile ride. Visits Violet Paget at Villa Pomerino outside of Florence. Meets art expert Bernhard Berenson, who strongly dislikes her. Goes to Salsomaggiore, west of Parma, for treatment of her asthma. Spends summer and fall at The Mount, with interval at Newport. Sells Land’s End for \$122,500, June 13. Begins *The House of Mirth*. Novella *Sanctuary* published by Scribner’s in October. Sails for England, early December. First conversations with Henry James, who comes up from Rye to London in mid-December.

1904

Purchases her first automobile, a Panhard-Levassor. With Edward driving, travels south to Hyères for a stay with the Bourgets, then to Cannes and Monte Carlo and back across France. In England, visits Henry James in Rye and tours Sussex with him. Returns to Lenox in late spring. Enthusiastic about motor travel, hires Charles Cook as a permanent chauffeur (he retains this position until 1921, when he suffers a stroke). *The Descent of Man*, collection of stories, published by Scribner’s in April. After reading reviews, writes Brownell that “the continued cry that I am an echo of Mr. James (whose books of

the last ten years I can't read, much as I delight in the man) . . . makes me feel rather hopeless." Hires Anna Bahlmann as secretary and literary assistant. Agrees with Burlingame in August to begin serialization of *The House of Mirth* in January 1905 *Scribner's*; undertakes schedule of intense work (usually writing in the morning) to meet deadline. (Finishes in March 1905; serialized Jan.–Nov.) House guests at The Mount include Brooks Adams and his wife, George Cabot Lodge (son of Senator Henry Cabot Lodge), Walter Berry, and Gaillard Lapsley, American-born don of medieval history at Trinity College, Cambridge. Henry James arrives in October with his friend Howard Sturgis, whom Wharton calls "the kindest and strangest of men." *Italian Villas and Their Gardens*, based on magazine articles, published by The Century Company in November. Returns to New York just before Christmas.

1905

Henry James visits at 884 Park Avenue for a few days in January. Whartons dine at the White House with President Roosevelt in March. *Italian Backgrounds*, sketches written since 1894, published by Scribner's in March. After European trip in spring, including visit to Salsomaggiore for asthma treatment, returns to The Mount. House guests include printer Berkeley Updike, illustrator Moncure Robinson, publisher Walter Maynard, Robert Grant, novelist and judge of the probate court in Boston, and Henry James. Visits Sara and Charles Eliot Norton. *The House of Mirth* published by Scribner's, October 14, in first printing of 40,000; 140,000 copies in print by the end of the year, "the most rapid sale of any book ever published by Scribner," according to Brownell. Literary earnings for year exceed \$20,000. Henry James writes Wharton that the novel is an "altogether superior thing" but "better written than composed." Reviews generally favorable. December, undertakes collaboration on stage version with playwright Clyde Fitch.

1906

Sails for France, March 10. Through Paul Bourget, enters intellectual and social circles of Paris, especially those of the Faubourg St. Germain. Among new acquaintances are poet Comtesse Anna de Noailles, historian Gustave Schlumberger, and his close friend, Comtesse Charlotte de Cossé-Brissac. Goes to England at the end of April. Whartons and Henry James make short motor tour of England. Visits Queen's Acre, Howard Sturgis's home in Windsor, for the first time (it soon becomes the center of her English social life). Meets Percy Lubbock, young writer and disciple of Henry James. Returns to France and takes motor tour with brother Henry, visiting cathedrals at Amiens and Beauvais, and Nohant, home of George Sand. Returns to Lenox in June. Works on novel *Justine Brent* (later retitled *The Fruit of the Tree*). Novella *Madame de Treymes* appears in the August *Scribner's* (published by *Scribner's* in February 1907). September, goes to Detroit with Edward and Walter Berry to see first performance of stage version of *The House of Mirth*. October opening in New York is a critical and commercial failure; Wharton calls the experience "instructive." Edward is away from Lenox, hunting and fishing, during much of the fall. Literary earnings for the year total almost \$32,000.

1907

Returns to Paris in January and rents the apartment of the George Vanderbilts at 58 Rue de Varenne, in the heart of the Faubourg St. Germain. *The Fruit of the Tree* serialized in *Scribner's*, January–November. March, takes a "motor-flight" through France with Edward and Henry James, visiting Nohant and touring southern France. Invites James to stay for another month, and takes a short automobile trip with James and Gaillard Lapsley. Engages instructor to teach her contemporary French; for a lesson exercise, writes a precursor sketch of *Ethan Frome*. April, sees much of William Morton Fullerton, forty-two-year-old Paris correspondent for the London *Times*, former student of Charles Eliot Norton, and disciple of Henry

James. Spends summer at The Mount. Sales of *The Fruit of the Tree*, published by Scribner's in October, reach 60,000. Reviews are good. Fullerton arrives at The Mount in October for a visit of several days. Wharton begins a journal addressed to him. Returns to Paris in December. *The House of Mirth* appears as *Chez les Heureux du Monde* in the *Revue de Paris*, translated by Charles du Bos, a young follower of Bourget.

1908

January–February, Edward afflicted by “nervous depression.” Wharton leads active social life, seeing linguist Vicomte Robert d’Humières, American ambassador Henry White, watercolorist Walter Gay and his wife, Matilda, James Van Alen, Fullerton, Comtesse Rosa de Fitz-James, Bourget, playwright Paul Hervieu, Charles du Bos, and others. February, spends time with Fullerton while Edward is away, and begins an affair with him in March. Edward, suffering from depression and pervasive pain, leaves for spa at Hot Springs, Arkansas, March 21. Wharton writes Brownell that Edward’s illness has prevented her from making much progress on new novel, *The Custom of the Country*, and doubts that it will be ready for serial publication by January 1909. April, moves to brother Henry’s townhouse on Place des Etats-Unis when he goes to America on business. Egerton Winthrop visits. When Henry James visits, arranges to have Jacques Emile Blanche paint portrait that she considers the best ever done of him. May, has first significant meetings with Henry Adams. Meditates in her journal on the propriety of her affair with Fullerton; writes series of love sonnets. May 22, gives Fullerton journal addressed to him; he returns it the following day as she leaves for America. On fifth day of crossing, writes story “The Choice”; resumes work on *The Custom of the Country*. In Lenox, has difficulty breathing for six weeks. Scribner’s publishes *The Hermit and the Wild Woman*, fourth collection of stories, in September, *A Motor-Flight Through France*, travel account,

in October. Writes poetry, enjoys reading Nietzsche's *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* (*Beyond Good and Evil*). Leaves for Europe, October 30. Introduced by Henry James to aging George Meredith at Box Hill, near London; goes with James Barrie to see performance of his play *What Every Woman Knows*. At Stanway, Gloucestershire home of Lady Mary Elcho, meets two young Englishmen who become close friends: Robert Norton, a landscape painter, and John Hugh Smith, a banker expert in Anglo-Russian financial affairs. Sees much of Henry James, who soon professes exhaustion from her visits, referring to her as "the Angel of Devastation." Crosses to France with Howard Sturgis for Christmas. Literary earnings for year are about \$15,000.

1909

January, Edward arrives in Paris, suffering from insomnia and inexplicable pain in his face and limbs. Work on *The Custom of the Country* again interrupted. Edward returns to Lenox in mid-April. *Artemis to Actaeon*, book of poetry, published by Scribner's in late April. Continues to write poetry, including "Ogrin the Hermit," long narrative based on a portion of the Tristan and Iseult legend. When lease on 58 Rue de Varenne expires, moves to large suite in Hotel Crillon, Place de la Concorde, April. Involves Henry James and Frederick Macmillan, Fullerton's publisher, in complicated scheme to conceal gift of money to Fullerton to meet blackmail demands of an ex-mistress. June, goes to London with Fullerton; they spend the night at the Charing Cross Hotel. After Fullerton leaves for America, writes "Terminus," fifty-two-line love poem. Stays in England until mid-July, visiting with Sturgis, Lapsley, and James. When Fullerton returns, they spend night in Rye at James's Lamb House. September, Henry Adams arranges another meeting between Wharton and Bernhard Berenson. Friendship develops. Edward arrives in Paris with his sister Nancy in November; soon confesses to Wharton that during the summer he sold some of her holdings, bought property in Boston, and lived there with his mistress. Edward returns to Boston.

Later admits to embezzling \$50,000 from Wharton's trust funds; makes restitution by drawing upon \$67,000 recently inherited from his mother.

1910

Moves into apartment at 53 Rue de Varenne, January. Writes stories "The Eyes" and "The Triumph of Night." Sells New York houses. Goes to England in March to see Henry James, who is recovering from a nervous breakdown. Edward returns to Paris, agrees to enter Swiss sanatorium for treatment of his depression. Begins short novel *Ethan Frome*. Walter Berry moves to Paris, stays in Whartons' guest suite for several months. July 3, sees Nijinsky dance in *L'Oiseau de Feu*. Affair with Fullerton ends. Visits Henry and William James at Lamb House in August. Sails in September to New York with Edward. October, Edward departs on trip around the world; Wharton returns to Paris, ill and exhausted. *Tales of Men and Ghosts* published by Scribner's in October; sells about 4,000 copies.

1911

January, confesses to Hugh Smith that "my writing tires and preoccupies me more than it used to." Tries unsuccessfully with William Dean Howells and Edmund Gosse to secure the Nobel Prize for Henry James. May, at Salsomaggiore for hay fever; resumes concerted work on *The Custom of the Country*. Returns to Lenox at end of June. Has Henry James, Hugh Smith, and Lapsley as guests. Wharton and Edward agree to formal separation in late July, then reverse decision. Returns to Europe in September after entrusting Edward with power to sell *The Mount*. *Ethan Frome* serialized in *Scribner's* from August through October, published by Scribner's in September. Reviewers in America and England call it one of her finest achievements. Disappointed with Scribner's reports of sales (4,200 copies by mid-November), Wharton protests lack of advertising, poor distribution, and bad typesetting. Tours central Italy and visits Berenson for the first time at his home, Villa I Tatti,

near Florence, in October. Puts *The Custom of the Country* aside in November to work on novel *The Reef*.

1912

Edward arrives in February at Rue de Varenne and stays until May. Relations remain distant and strained. Visits La Verna, monastery in Tuscany mountains, with Berry; their car must be lowered by ropes for them to return. Sale of *The Mount* for undisclosed sum completed in June. Offers to live with Edward in United States, but he refuses. Summer, sees much of Henry James during visits to England. Arranges with Charles Scribner for \$8,000 of her royalties to be given to James under the guise of an advance for his novel-in-progress, *The Ivory Tower*. (James receives \$3,600 in 1913; the novel is never completed.) *The Reef* published by D. Appleton and Company, which had given her \$15,000 advance. Reviews are relatively poor; sales reach 7,000. Resumes work on *The Custom of the Country*.

1913

The Custom of the Country appears in Scribner's, January–November. Receives unexpected letter from brother Henry denouncing her for coldness toward Countess Tecla, his mistress and intended wife. Sues Edward for divorce on grounds of adultery; Paris tribunal grants decree, April 16. Helps to initiate effort to raise gift of \$5,000 for Henry James's seventieth birthday; effort abandoned when James discovers and angrily rejects it. Drives across Sicily with Berry in April. Friendship develops with Geoffrey Scott, author of *The Architecture of Humanism*. Favorably impressed by premiere of Igor Stravinsky's ballet *Le Sacre du Printemps* in Paris, May 29. Considers buying house outside of London, but eventually decides against it. August, finishes *The Custom of the Country*. Travels with Berenson through Luxembourg and Germany, stopping at Cologne, Dresden, and Berlin. Begins novel *Literature*, never completed. *The Custom of the Country* published by Scribner's in October; sales reach nearly

60,000. December, attends wedding of niece, landscape gardener Beatrix Jones (daughter of brother Frederic and Mary Cadwalader) and Yale historian Max Farrand, in New York. Finds New York “queer, rootless” and “overwhelming.”

1914

Returns to Paris in January. Sends Henry James copy of Marcel Proust’s recently published *Du Côté de chez Swann*. March, sails from Marseilles to Algiers with Percy Lubbock and Anna Bahlmann. Drives through northern Algeria and Tunisia, “an unexpurgated page of the Arabian Nights!” Frightened in Timgad, Algeria, by intruder in her room, who flees when she screams. July, tours Spain with Berry for three weeks, viewing cave paintings at Altamira. Returns to Paris July 31, three days before outbreak of war between France and Germany. August, establishes workroom near Rue de Varenne for seamstresses and other women thrown out of work by the economic disruption of general mobilization. Collects funds, selects supervisory staff, arranges for supply of work orders, free lunches, and coal allotments. Late August, goes to Stocks, English country house rented from novelist Mrs. Humphry Ward, a trip planned before the war. Sees Henry James at Rye. After learning of battle of the Marne, makes arrangements, with difficulty, to return to Paris; succeeds by end of September. November, establishes and directs American Hostels for Refugees. Selects Elisina Tyler, friend since 1912, as administrative deputy; raises \$100,000 in first twelve months. (Hostels assists 9,330 refugees by end of 1915, providing free or low-cost food, clothing, coal, housing, medical and child care, and assistance in finding work.)

1915

February, visits the front in the Argonne and at Verdun. Tours hospitals, investigating need for blankets and clothing; watches French assault on village of Vauquois. Makes five more visits to front in next six months, including tour of forward trenches in the Vosges;

describes them in articles for *Scribner's* (collected in *Fighting France, from Dunkerque to Belfort*, published by Scribner's in November). April, organizes Children of Flanders Rescue Committee with Tyler, establishing six homes between Paris and the Normandy coast. Committee sets up classes in lace-making for girls, industrial training for boys, French for Flemish speakers. Nearly 750 Flemish children, many of them tubercular, cared for in 1915. Increasingly concentrates on fund-raising and creation of sponsoring committees in France and the United States, delegating daily administration to Tyler. Arranges benefit concerts and an art exhibition. Edits *The Book of the Homeless* (published by Scribner's early in 1916), with introductions by Marshal Joffre and Theodore Roosevelt. Contributors of poetry, essays, art, fiction, and musical scores include Cocteau, Conrad, Howells, Anna de Noailles, Hardy, Yeats, Eleanora Duse, Sarah Bernhardt, Henry James, Max Beerbohm, Paul Claudel, Edmond Rostand, Monet, Leon Bakst, and Stravinsky. Wharton does most of the translations. Proceeds (approximately \$8,000 from the book, \$7,000 from the sale of art and manuscripts) go to Hostels and Rescue Committee. Friendship develops with André Gide, who serves on a Hostels committee. October, makes short visit to England. Learns in December that Henry James is dying; writes Lapsley: "His friendship has been the pride & honour of my life."

1916

Henry James dies February 28. Spring, helps establish treatment program for tubercular French soldiers. Made Chevalier of the Legion of Honor, April 8. Mourns deaths of Egerton Winthrop (tells Berenson that Winthrop and Henry James "made up the sum of the best I have known in human nature") and secretary Anna Bahlmann. Informs Charles Scribner that she is working on novel *The Glimpses of the Moon* and a work "of the dimensions of *Ethan Frome*. It deals with the same kind of life in a midsummer landscape." Offers the latter for serial publication, but Charles Scribner declines, having already

scheduled her 1892 “Bunner Sisters” for fall; accepts offer from Appleton for book and from *McClure's* for serial. Feels financial pressure due to expense of refugee work, reduced literary earnings, and effects of American income tax. *Xingu and Other Stories* (all except one story written before the war) published in October by Scribner's.

1917

Summer, companion piece to *Ethan Frome*, serialized in *McClure's* for \$7,000, February–August; published by Appleton July 2. Grows fond of Ronald Simmons, young American officer and painter. After tuberculosis treatment centers are taken over by the Red Cross, establishes four convalescent homes for tubercular civilians. September, makes month-long tour of French Morocco with Walter Berry. Witnesses self-lacerative ritual dances and visits harem, noting its air of “somewhat melancholy respectability.”

1918

Inspired by success of American troops, gives public lecture on American life. Summer, brother Frederic dies; Wharton, long estranged from him, writes sadly of her brother Henry's failure to contact her. Deeply grieved by death from pneumonia of Ronald Simmons, August 12. Finds Paris increasingly noisy. After long negotiation, purchases Jean-Marie, house in village of St. Brice-sous-Fôret, outside of Paris (will restore its original name, Pavillon Colombe). Novel *The Marne* published by Appleton.

1919

Rising expenses, support of financially troubled Mary Cadwalader Jones, establishment of trust fund for three Belgian children, together with changing New York real estate market and effects of American income tax, create financial pressure. Accepts offer of \$18,000 from *The Pictorial Review* for serial rights to her next novel. Unable to finish *The Glimpses of the Moon*, suggests *A Son at the Front*,

but both magazine and book editors feel that the public is tired of war material. Proposes novel *Old New York* (later retitled *The Age of Innocence*), set in 1875. Magazine accepts, and Appleton advances \$15,000 against royalties. Leases Ste. Claire du Vieux Château in Hyères, overlooking Mediterranean. Moves into Pavillon Colombe in August. *French Ways and Their Meaning*, collection of magazine articles, published by Appleton. “Beatrice Palmato” outline and fragment, explicit treatment of father-daughter incest, probably written at this time (the story is never finished).

1920

Howard Sturgis dies in January; end of Queen’s Acre gatherings. In *Morocco*, travel account, published by Scribner’s in October. *The Age of Innocence*, serialized in *The Pictorial Review* July–October, published by Appleton in October, sells 66,000 copies in six months (by 1922 it earns Wharton nearly \$70,000). December, moves to Hyères for several months.

1921

Resumes work on *The Glimpses of the Moon*. Writes *The Old Maid*, novella about out-of-wedlock birth (rejected by *Ladies’ Home Journal* for being “a bit too vigorous for us”). Begins long friendship with Philomène de LévisMirepoix (later Philomène de la Forest-Divonne, who will write journalism and novels under the name Claude Sylve). *The Age of Innocence* awarded Pulitzer Prize in May. Later learns that the jury had originally voted for Sinclair Lewis’s *Main Street*, but had been overruled by the trustees of Columbia University, who thought it too controversial. Writes to Lewis in August of her “disgust” at the action and invites him to St. Brice (he makes the first of several visits in October). *The Old Maid* bought by *Red Book* for \$2,250 (serialized Feb.–April 1922). September, finishes *The Glimpses of the Moon*. Goes to Hyères in mid-December.

1922

At Hyères until late May; June to mid-December at St. Brice. Summer, long-time friend and correspondent Sara Norton dies. When estranged brother Henry dies in August Wharton writes Berenson that “he was the dearest of brothers to all my youth . . .” *The Glimpses of the Moon* serialized in *The Pictorial Review*; published by Appleton in August, sells more than 100,000 copies in America and Britain in six months, earning her \$60,000 from various rights and royalties.

1923

Film version of *The Glimpses of the Moon*, with dialogue titles by F. Scott Fitzgerald, released in April. (Six other films were made from Wharton’s works between 1918 and 1934; she had no involvement in any of the productions.) Invited by Yale University to receive honorary Doctor of Letters degree. Although reluctant to attend, decides she needs to see United States if she is to continue writing about it. Accepts degree (the first to be awarded to a woman by Yale) at commencement in New Haven, June 20. Returns to France after eleven-day visit, her first since 1913 and her last. Novel *A Son at the Front* published by Scribner’s in September, fulfilling promise made a decade earlier to give Scribner’s another novel after *The Custom of the Country*. Works on novel *The Mother’s Recompense*.

1924

Old New York, collection of four novellas, published by Appleton in May in boxed sets of four volumes. Titles are *False Dawn* (*The ’Forties*), *The Old Maid* (*The ’Fifties*), *The Spark* (*The ’Sixties*), *New Year’s Day* (*The ’Seventies*). About 26,000 sets sold in six months, with another 3,000 volumes sold individually. Awarded Gold Medal for “distinguished service” by National Institute of Arts and Letters.

1925

The Mother’s Recompense published by Appleton in April after serialization in *The Pictorial Review* October 1924–March 1925. Sales

are good. June, receives inscribed copy of *The Great Gatsby* from F. Scott Fitzgerald. July, Fitzgerald visits St. Brice; the encounter is strained and awkward. *The Writing of Fiction*, collection of five essays, including long appreciation of Proust, published by Scribner's in the late summer.

1926

Charters 360-ton steam yacht *Osprey* for ten-week cruise with guests through the Mediterranean and Aegean, March–June. *Here and Beyond*, collection of short stories, published by Appleton in summer. *Twelve Poems* published in London by The Medici Society. Elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters. September, travels with Berry through northern Italy. Finishes novel *Twilight Sleep* in November. Buys Ste. Claire, Hyères home, for \$40,000.

1927

January, Berry suffers mild stroke; convalesces at Hyères for two months, depressed and irritable. *The Pictorial Review* pays \$40,000 for serial rights to novel *The Children* after *Delineator* offers \$42,000; promises *Delineator* the novel *The Keys of Heaven*. *Twilight Sleep* published by Appleton in June; sells well. Walter Berry suffers second stroke in Paris, October 2. Wharton visits him on his deathbed; he dies October 12. Writes Lapsley: "No words can tell of my desolation. He had been to me in turn all that one being can be to another, in love, in friendship, in understanding."

1928

Edward Wharton dies in New York, February 7. *The Children* is serialized in *The Pictorial Review* April–July, published by Appleton in September; earns \$95,000 from sales and film rights. Begins novel *Hudson River Bracketed* after abandoning *The Keys of Heaven*. Friendship develops with Desmond MacCarthy, British writer and editor. December, *The Age of Innocence*, dramatized by Margaret Ayer Barnes, opens on Broadway, runs until June 1929, then tours for four

months, earning Wharton \$23,500.

1929

Severe winter storms devastate Ste. Claire gardens; describes effect as “torture.” February, learns that *Delineator* began serialization of *Hudson River Bracketed* in September 1928, six months ahead of schedule. Contracts severe pneumonia in March and nearly dies. Recovers by midsummer. Saddened by death of Geoffrey Scott in August. Finishes *Hudson River Bracketed* (published by Appleton in Nov.) and begins restoration of Ste. Claire gardens. Awarded Gold Medal for “special distinction in literature” by American Academy of Arts and Letters.

1930

Elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters. *Certain People*, collection of short stories, published by Appleton in summer. Autumn, meets art critic and historian Kenneth Clark while traveling in Tuscany; deep friendship develops. December, meets Aldous Huxley, who introduces her to anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski.

1931

Visits England in July and sees H. G. Wells, Harold Nicolson, and Osbert, Sacheverell, and Dame Edith Sitwell. Attends several Roman Catholic services during visit to Rome in November.

1932

January, finishes novel *The Gods Arrive*, sequel to *Hudson River Bracketed*. Rejected for serial publication by *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Liberty*, and *Collier's* because it features an unmarried couple living together. Sold to *Delineator* for \$50,000 despite Wharton's anger over handling of *Hudson River Bracketed*, appearing February–August. Published by Appleton later in year, it sells poorly. Begins autobiography, *A Backward Glance*. Effects of the Depression begin to be felt in greatly diminished literary earnings; magazine offers for

short stories fall drastically. Visits Rome in May. Becomes godmother to Kenneth Clark's son Colin.

1933

Catherine Gross, Wharton's companion since 1884, falls into paranoid dementia in April, dies in October. Elise Duvlenck, her personal maid since 1914, dies May 29. *Human Nature*, collection of short stories, published by Appleton. By threat of legal action, forces *Ladies' Home Journal* to honor pre-Depression agreement to pay \$25,000 for her autobiography; installments appear October 1933–April 1934. June, vacations in England with Gaillard Lapsley, visits Wales for the first time; August goes to Salzburg for a week and in October visits Holland. Begins novel *The Buccaneers* (never finished, but published by Appleton-Century in 1938 with Wharton's long outline of the remainder of the story and an afterword by Gaillard Lapsley).

1934

Tours England and Scotland. Guided through National Gallery in London by Kenneth Clark. *A Backward Glance* published by Appleton-Century. Breaks with Appleton editor Rutger Jewett, who had acted as her agent without commission for over a decade, blaming him for decreased literary earnings; engages James Pinker as new agent.

1935

The Old Maid, dramatized by Zoë Akins, opens in New York for successful run. April, suffers mild stroke, with temporary loss of sight in left eye. September, Mary Cadwalader Jones dies.

1936

Ethan Frome, dramatized by Owen and Donald Davis, tours United States after successful New York run. Income from both plays is about \$130,000, ending financial worry. Visits England in the summer. *The World Over*, collection of short stories, published by

Appleton-Century.

1937

Sends last completed short story, "All Souls'," to her agent, February. Health declines; suffers stroke, June 1. Dies at St. Brice on the evening of August 11. Buried near Walter Berry in the Cimetière des Gonards, Versailles, August 14.

Note on the Texts

This volume, the first of a two-volume selection of the shorter fiction of Edith Wharton, presents 38 stories first published between 1891 and 1910. Thirty of these stories have been taken from the Scribner first editions of five of Wharton's story collections: *The Greater Inclination* (1899), *Crucial Instances* (1901), *The Descent of Man* (1904), *The Hermit and the Wild Woman* (1908), and *Tales of Men and Ghosts* (1910). Two stories published by Scribner's as separate books, *The Touchstone* (1900) and *Sanctuary* (1903), are also reprinted from the first editions. Six stories not collected by Wharton during her lifetime are reprinted from their original periodical appearances. The stories are arranged chronologically by date of publication of the texts chosen for reprinting here; those gathered by Wharton in book form follow the order in which they were presented in the collected volumes.

Wharton oversaw the publication of her stories with great care. She corrected or closely supervised the correction of typescripts, galleys, and page proofs, offered opinions on typesetting, and complained when production fell short of her standards. She tended to revise, sometimes lightly and sometimes substantially, between periodical and book publication, but she did not make later revisions in any of the stories included in this volume.

Wharton arranged for the English publication of her stories, first with John Murray and later with the Macmillan Company, as they were being prepared for the press in the United States or soon afterward. The English editions were typeset directly from Scribner's proof sheets, sometimes with Wharton's corrections, meant (as she noted in a letter of 24 July 1903 to W. C. Brownell at Scribner's) to

“tally exactly with the revised American sheets.” For reasons of copyright, *The Touchstone* was published in England as *A Gift from the Grave: The Touch of a Vanished Hand* (1900), a title supplied by the publisher and disliked by Wharton. One story included in the present volume, “Mrs. Manstey’s View,” also appeared during Wharton’s lifetime in an anthology, *Stories of New York* (New York: Scribner’s, 1893), but it does not appear that she was responsible for the minor textual variants introduced there.

The following list gives the sources of the stories included in this volume and details of their prior publication in periodicals. Stories not collected by Wharton in book form are marked with an asterisk.

*Mrs. Manstey’s View

Scribner’s Magazine 10 (July 1891): 117–22.

*The Fulness of Life

Scribner’s Magazine 14 (December 1893): 699–704.

*The Lamp of Psyche

Scribner’s Magazine 18 (October 1895): 418–28.

*The Valley of Childish Things, and Other Emblems

The Century Magazine 52 (July 1896): 467–69.

from *The Greater Inclination* (New York: Scribner’s, 1899)

The Muse’s Tragedy

Scribner’s Magazine 25 (January 1899): 77–84.

A Journey

No periodical publication.

The Pelican

Scribner’s Magazine 24 (November 1898): 620–29.

Souls Belated

No periodical publication.

The Twilight of the God
No periodical publication.
A Cup of Cold Water
No periodical publication.

The Touchstone (New York: Scribner's, 1900)

The Touchstone
Scribner's Magazine 27 (March 1900): 354–72; 27 (April 1900):
483–501.

from *Crucial Instances* (New York: Scribner's, 1901)

The Duchess at Prayer
Scribner's Magazine 28 (August 1900): 153–60.
The Angel at the Grave
Scribner's Magazine 29 (February 1901): 158–66.
The Recovery
Harper's Magazine 102 (February 1901): 468–77.

The Rembrandt
Hearst's International-Cosmopolitan 29 (August 1900): 429–37.
The Moving Finger
Harper's Magazine 102 (March 1901): 627–32.

Sanctuary (New York: Scribner's, 1903)

Sanctuary
Scribner's Magazine 34 (August 1903): 148–62; 34 (September
1903): 280–90; 34 (October 1903): 439–47; 34 (November
1903): 570–80.

from *The Descent of Man* (New York: Scribner's, 1904)

The Descent of Man
Scribner's Magazine 35 (March 1904): 313–22.
The Mission of Jane
Harper's Magazine 106 (December 1902): 63–74.

The Other Two

Collier's 32 (13 February 1904): 15–17, 20.

The Reckoning

Harper's Magazine 105 (August 1902): 342–55.

Expiation

Hearst's International-Cosmopolitan 36 (December 1903): 209–22.

The Lady's Maid's Bell

Scribner's Magazine 32 (November 1902): 549–60.

*The House of the Dead Hand

Atlantic Monthly 94 (August 1904): 145–60.

*The Introducers

Ainslee's 16 (December 1905): 139–48; 16 (January 1906): 61–67.

from *The Hermit and the Wild Woman* (New York: Scribner's, 1908)

The Hermit and the Wild Woman

Scribner's Magazine 39 (February 1906): 145–56.

The Last Asset

Scribner's Magazine 36 (August 1904): 150–68.

The Pretext

Scribner's Magazine 44 (August 1908): 173–87.

The Pot-Boiler

Scribner's Magazine 36 (December 1904): 696–712.

The Best Man

Collier's 35 (2 September 1905): 14–17, 21–22.

from *Tales of Men and Ghosts* (New York: Scribner's, 1910)

His Father's Son

Scribner's Magazine 45 (June 1909): 657–65.

The Daunt Diana

Scribner's Magazine 46 (July 1909): 35–41.

The Debt

Scribner's Magazine 46 (August 1909): 165–72.

Full Circle

Scribner's Magazine 46 (October 1909): 408–19.

The Legend

Scribner's Magazine 47 (March 1910): 278–91.

The Eyes

Scribner's Magazine 47 (June 1910): 671–80.

Afterward

Century Magazine 79 (January 1910): 321–39.

The Letters

Century Magazine 80 (August 1910): 485–92; 80 (September 1910): 641–50; 80 (October 1910): 812–19.

This volume presents the texts of the printings chosen for inclusion here but does not attempt to reproduce features of their typographic design. The texts are reproduced without change, except for the correction of obvious typographical errors. Spelling, capitalization, and punctuation are often expressive features and they are not altered, even when inconsistent or irregular. The following is a list of typographical errors, cited by page and line number: 72.9, folks.; 84.3, [no paragraph indent] She; 122.22, whithout; 499.33, wont; 500.12, loose; 508.24, vault-; 515.37, villege; 625.25–26, Bu het; 640.24, at the; 669.8, always; 783.16, didn't.; 821.35, now, and; 881.30, remimiscences. Errors corrected second printing: 27.15, now; 348.24, Does; 616.25, type'; 685.25, continued; 858.16, here".

Notes

In the notes below, the reference numbers denote page and line of this volume (the line count includes chapter headings). No note is made for information included in standard desk reference works such as Webster's *Collegiate*, *Biographical*, and *Geographical* dictionaries. References to Shakespeare are keyed to the Riverside edition (G. Blakemore Evans, ed., Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974). For further information and references to other studies, see: Stephen Garrison, *Edith Wharton: A Descriptive Bibliography* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990); R.W.B. Lewis, *Edith Wharton: A Biography* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975); Cynthia Griffin Wolff, *A Feast of Words: The Triumph of Edith Wharton* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

1.6–7 the gaps . . . Curtius] Roman historian whose ten-book life of Alexander the Great, *De Rebus Gestis Alexandri Magni* (c. 41–45), begins with book 3 and has gaps between books 5 and 6 and in book 10.

17.12 Decameron] Collection of stories by Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–75) represented as being told by fugitives from the plague in Florence.

18.34–35 the stooping Victory . . . Apteros] On the parapet of the Temple of Athena Nike (c. 425 B.C.E.), in the Acropolis.

20.5–7 'Faust' . . . 'Lycidas'] *Faust*, epic poem (1790–1831) by Johan Wolfgang von Goethe; *Vita Nuova*, spiritual autobiography in prose and verse (c. 1300) by Dante Alighieri; *The Tempest*, play (1611) by

William Shakespeare; *Les Caprices de Marianne*, comedy of manners (1833) by Alfred de Musset; “Paradise” (*Paradiso*), third canticle of the *Commedia*, epic poem (c. 1320) by Dante Alighieri; “Epipsychidion,” poem (1821) by Percy Bysshe Shelley; “Lycidas,” elegy (1637) by John Milton.

33.3–4 *Je prends . . . trouve*] I take my good where I find it.

39.7–8 Hôtel Drouot] An auction house.

51.23 ‘And did . . . plain?’] “Ah, did you once see Shelley plain,” the first line of Robert Browning’s “Memorabilia” (*Men and Women*, 1855).

55.17 *Pour comprendre . . . aimer*] To understand one must love.

56.2 Egeria] Nymph said to have inspired the legendary Roman king Numa Pompilius; a woman adviser or companion.

58.8 Tithonus . . . immortality!] In Greek mythology, Tithonus begged for immortality, but neglected to ask for eternal youth. As he grew older he prayed to be removed from the world, but he was transformed into a cicada.

61.6 *Il faut . . .* Pascal says;] It takes skill to love (Blaise Pascal, *Discours sur les passions de l’amour*, 1652–1653).

61.14 *Lucile*] Book-length verse romance published in 1860 by Edward Bulwer-Lytton under the pseudonym Owen Meredith.

61.35 *il avait pris son pli*] He was set in his ways.

78.3–4 Emerson’s line . . . *seeing*] “Tell them, dear, that if eyes were made for seeing, / Then Beauty is its own excuse for being” (Emerson, “The Rhodora,” 1839).

80.10 Lewes’s book] *The Life and Works of Goethe* (1885), by George

Henry Lewes.

81.18 Infant-Samuel-Like] cf. 1 Samuel 2:18.

100.32 *Je n'en vois pas la nécessité!*] I don't see the need for it!

103.11–12 *tout d'une pièce*] All of a piece.

105.10 *Civis Romanus sum*] “I am a Roman citizen,” a claim which, according to Cicero (*In Verrem*, II.v), “has often helped and even saved many a man among barbarians even in the remotest lands.”

107.23–24 laurustinus] *Viburnum tinus*, an evergreen shrub.

109.10 Doucet draperies] Jacques Doucet (1853–1929), Paris couturier famous for his tea gowns.

120.27–28 as Latude . . . cell] Henri Masers de Latude (1725–1805), a French officer imprisoned for plotting to poison the mistress of Louis XV, attempted unsuccessfully to escape the Bastille on three occasions before being released in 1777, only to be reimprisoned for failing to return to his native village.

121.15 *noyade*] Flood.

122.22 Bradshaw] *Bradshaw's Monthly Railway Guide*, a series of time-tables begun in 1839 by printer George Bradshaw.

144.30 that *Lost-Chord* look] *The Lost Chord*, a popular ballad composed by Sir Arthur Sullivan in 1877, with lyrics by Adelaide A. Procter. 160.20–22 a line from Hamlet . . . *desire*.] *Hamlet*, I.v.130.

240.35 *bravi*] Bullies, cut-throats.

247.28–29 Elisabetta Sirani] Bolognese painter (1638–1665).

255.16 *The Culprit Fay*] Poem (1816) by Joseph Rodman Drake.

256.34–35 Raphael Morghen] Italian engraver (1758–1833).

264.36 Mechlin cap] Cap made from a black cloth produced in the Belgian town of Mechlin.

266.1 Brook Farm] Cooperative community established in 1841 near West Roxbury, Massachusetts, by the Transcendentalist Club. It became the American center of Fourierism around 1843 and was dissolved in 1847.

290.8–9 old Saxe . . . Marc Antonios] Porcelain produced (1710–) at the Meissen factory near Dresden in Saxony; engravings by Marcantonio Raimondi (c. 1480–c. 1534), who copied Michelangelo and Raphael.

292.1 *devanture*] Display window.

348.20–21 *credo quia absurdum*] *Credo quia absurdum est*, “I believe because it is absurd,” a phrase attributed to Tertullian (cf. *De carne Christi*, V.iv).

404.9 Filioque] A combination of Latin words meaning “and from the Son,” added to the Nicene Creed by the Third Council of Toledo in 589.

405.29–30 *sapolio*] A brand of household soap.

409.25 Babism] Persian sect founded in 1844, incorporating elements of Sufism, gnosticism, and Shiite Islam.

413.23 *Labor . . . voluptas.*] Labor is a pleasure in itself.

491.33–34 the Huysmans . . . Cathédrale, eh?] Joris-Karl Huysmans, author of *La Cathédrale* (1898) and several essays on church art, began his career as a naturalist in the manner of Emile Zola.

527.14 St. John of the Louvre] *St. John the Baptist*, painting (c. 1513–

1516) by Leonardo da Vinci.

528.17–18 the famous definition . . . *Meister*] In Book IV, Chapter 13 of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1795–1796), Hamlet is described as “an oak tree planted in a costly vase which should only have borne pleasing flowers in its bosom, but the roots expand and the vase is shattered.”

537.11–12 played the wall . . . Thisbe] Cf. Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, III.i.61–72.

541.5–6 the letter killeth] Cf. 2 Corinthians 3:6.

543.28 the priest and the Levite] In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30–37), both a priest and a Levite pass by an injured man without stopping to help him.

552.1 *pièce montée*] Centerpiece of food arranged on a platter or buffet, often multitiered.

555.26 *Comme vous y allez!*] How you go on!

556.9 *sauterie*] Informal dance.

564.37 “*J’ai failli* . . . quoted] “I very nearly had to wait!” (attributed to Louis XIV).

578.6 swallow-tails] Fork-tailed flags.

578.31–32 the Desert Fathers] The earliest monks of the Middle Eastern deserts (second century A.D. onward).

580.17 hodden] A coarse woolen cloth.

583.4 lentisk] The mastic tree, an evergreen shrub.

583.29–31 Saint Mary . . . Abbot Zosimus] Legendary story of a fifth-

century penitent who lived as a hermit in the desert beyond the river Jordan. The monk Zosimus met her by chance, and promised to return to bring her Holy Communion. When he came back, he found her dead and buried her.

586.24 Landsknechts] A sixteenth-century German mercenary force.

587.24 *Angelus Domini nuntiavit Mariae*] “The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary,” a devotional prayer said three times a day to commemorate the Annunciation.

590.12–13 a mouth . . . for water] Cf. Luke 16:19–31.

594.20–21 the hour of Nones] The ninth hour of the canonical day.

594.37–38 *carduus benedictus*] A type of thistle.

597.32 the *Veni, sancte spiritus*] “Come, Holy Spirit,” a song sequence sung at Mass every day during Pentecost.

600.5 *Salve Regina*] “Hail, Queen of Mercy,” a Catholic hymn to the Virgin Mary.

610.27 *dot*] Dowry.

628.38 *Almanach de Gotha*] A publication containing the genealogies of royal houses of Europe and their descendants, first published in 1763.

629.36 *buvette*] A small refreshment stand or tavern.

637.39 *femme incomprise*] A misunderstood or unappreciated wife.

675.13 *piocher*] Toil.

691.4 *lettres de cachet*] Arbitrary warrants of imprisonment.

721.4 a Latmian night] In Greek myth and by poetic tradition, the

Moon descended to visit Endymion, a handsome shepherd of Mount Latmos, and chastely admired his beauty as he slept.

732.40 *anticaglie*] Worthless antiques.

733.30 *coup de foudre*] Thunderbolt; love at first sight.

734.5 the Kohinoor] A large Indian diamond which became one of the British crown jewels on the annexation of the Punjab in 1849.

736.9 Tanagras] Terra-cotta figurines from the ancient Greek necropolis of Tanagra.

736.28 *Scalone*] Grand or main staircase.

736.29 *réduit*] Nook.

739.9 *brocanteur*] Dealer in secondhand goods or junk.

739.23 *plaquette*] A small ornamental tablet.

741.10 *Elle était . . . pleurer*] She was stupid enough to make you cry.

742.2 “crushes”] Crowded social gatherings.

746.10 “Barbara Frietchie”] Poem (1863) by John Greenleaf Whittier.

748.21 his predestined Huxley] Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–1895), a scientist, philosopher, and lecturer.

748.36–37 *Limulus Polyphemus*] Species of one-eyed crab.

749.40 Horatius . . . the other] Horatius Cocles, a legendary Roman hero, held back the Etruscan army of Porsenna from the wooden Sublician bridge until it could be demolished, then swam across the Tiber to safety.

750.18 *que Paris . . . messe!*] That Paris is well worth a mass! (remark attributed to Henry IV on his conversion to Catholicism in order to become king).

753.10 “Careful . . . *Kallima*] Butterfly genus the members of which often mimic the appearance of dead leaves.

789.12 *Fiat Lux*] Let there be light (Genesis 1:3).

795.5–6 like Psyche . . . chrysalis] Psyche, the goddess of the soul, was represented in Greek mythology as a butterfly.

804.1 *de toutes pièces*] Out of whole cloth.

818.19–20 *vertige de l’abîme*] Vertigo (literally, “dizziness of the abyss”).

820.38 *bêtise*] Stupidity.

826.3 Cherubino] Amorous pageboy in Mozart’s opera *The Marriage of Figaro* (1785).

826.17 Gautier’s axiom] “Nothing is truly beautiful unless it is useless” (Théophile Gautier, from the preface to his novel *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, 1836).

831.24 *signalement*] Description, particulars.

862.1 *cabinet de lecture*] Reading room.

862.27 *lingerie*] Linen room.

864.24 *mention*] Distinction.

875.26 *bonne*] Housemaid.

876.3 *blanchisseuse*] Laundress.